

A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

FRANCIS FERGUSSON:
Oedipus Rex

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH:
Mask to Mask

WILLIAM GOYEN:
Four American Portraits
as Elegy

KLAUS MANN:
Dream-America

MARGARET WEBSTER:
The Last of Shaw?

JOSEPH WHITT
DAVID PEACKER

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN
J. RADCLIFFE SQUIRES

W. S. GRAHAM
NEIL WEISS

SPRING, 1948

30 CENTS

new directions books

ERNST JUENGER

published a novel in Nazi Germany in 1939 which subtly attacked the nature of tyranny. This imaginative piece of writing, *On the Marble Cliffs*, may be the only real contribution of Hitler's regime and is certain to provoke discussion. (\$2.50)

WILLIAM EVERSON

won a discriminating audience with seven small books of poetry published since 1935. Now in *The Residual Years* these poems — characterized by directness and sensuousness — are collected into a handsome volume. Everson belongs in the tradition of Lawrence and shares with Patchen and Rexroth their intense personalism, religious anarchism and rejection of war. (\$3.00)

THOMAS MERTON

is a young Trappist monk whose first books of poetry brought from critics the most impressive tributes given to any religious poet for many years. His new collection, *Figures for an Apocalypse*, is supplemented by a provocative essay called "Poetry and the Contemplative Life." (\$2.50)

MONTAGU O'REILLY

has gathered the best of his strange, out-of-this-world stories in *Who Has Been Tampering with These Pianos?* The combination of international society and American tycoons with fantastically delicate incidents, mostly centering about pianos, makes these tales delightful. Direction No. 4. (\$1.50)

VERNON WATKINS

is a young Welsh poet who, like Dylan Thomas, has drawn much of his material from Welsh legend. Though little known in the USA, his reputation in England is more substantial than that of any other poet of his age. His *Selected Poems* includes the best work from his published books. (\$3.00)

EZRA POUND

has been at work for more than twenty years on a monumental poem *The Cantos*. The latest volume is *The Pisan Cantos* (\$2.75), which carries the poem from Canto 74 through 84 and is so named because much of it was completed while Pound was confined in an Army Prison Camp near Pisa. All the sections completed to date, including *The Pisan Cantos*, are collected in one volume *The Cantos*. (\$5.00)

—NEW DIRECTIONS— 500 Fifth Ave., NYC—

CONTENTS

William Goyen: <i>Four American Portraits as Elegy</i> -----	131
Joseph Warren Beach: <i>Mythology</i> -----	142
<i>Bay Window</i> -----	143
<i>Fragment of a Canto</i> -----	143
<i>Mask to Mask</i> -----	144
Francis Fergusson: <i>Oedipus Rex: The Tragic Rhythm of Action</i> ..	145
W. S. Graham: <i>Men Sign the Sea</i> -----	169
Neil Weiss: <i>Song for Blackbirds</i> -----	170
J. Radcliffe Squires: <i>The Roses</i> -----	171
Joseph Whitt: <i>Inside the Arch of Bone</i> -----	172
David J. Peacker: <i>Spain</i> -----	172
Klaus Mann: <i>Dream America</i> -----	173
Margaret Webster: <i>The Last of Shaw?</i> (review of <i>Bernard Shaw</i> by Eric Bentley)-----	184
Stanley Edgar Hyman: <i>The Critic as Narcissus</i> (review of <i>Wil-</i> <i>liam Blake</i> by Mark Schorer, <i>On a Darkling Plain</i> by Harvey Curtis Webster, <i>Joseph Conrad</i> by Albert Guerard, Jr., <i>Call</i> <i>Me Ishmael</i> by Charles Olson)-----	187

EDITORS: Kerker Quinn, Charles Shattuck, George Scouffas, Donald Hill,
Arthur Carr, John Schacht, Carl Hartman, Lester Heller.

ASSISTANTS: Penny Hartman, Sally Jauch, Mary Bath.

ACCENT: Box 102 University Station, Urbana, Illinois. Published quarterly.
Subscription: \$1.00 for a year, \$1.75 for two years in the United States (else-
where \$1.25 for a year, \$2.00 for two years). Manuscripts will not be returned
unless accompanied by self-addressed envelopes. Entered as second-class matter
September 26, 1940, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3,
1879. Copyright, 1948, by ACCENT.

"Patchen is the most compelling force in American poetry since Walt Whitman."

James Laughlin

". . . An honest man . . . a prose writer of genius."
Henry Miller

We are proud to be publisher of eight of Kenneth Patchen's books. (One of his recent books received exactly no reviews.)

P A D E L L

830 Broadway

New York City 3

CONTRIBUTORS

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH is chairman of the English department at Minnesota and a widely published poet and literary critic.

FRANCIS FERGUSSON, at present at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, has been director of the theatre at Bennington College and contributor to *Hound and Horn*, the *Kenyon Review*, and other journals.

WILLIAM GOYEN lives in Houston. His stories have been accepted by *Made-moiselle*, the *Southwest Review*, and *New Directions*.

W. S. GRAHAM is a Scottish writer now in America on an Atlantic Award in Literature, studying and lecturing at New York University. Faber and Faber is publishing a collection of his poems this spring.

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN is on the *New Yorker*. His volume analyzing the methods of 20th-century literary criticism will appear this summer.

KLAUS MANN is a son of Thomas Mann and a well-known critic and editor.

DAVID J. PEACKER is a young poet and short story writer who lives in Brooklyn.

J. RADCLIFFE SQUIRES teaches at Dartmouth.

MARGARET WEBSTER is a noted interpreter, both as director and actress, of plays by Shakespeare, Shaw, and Tchekov. She is the daughter of Ben Webster and Dame May Whitty.

NEIL WEISS has been a shipyard worker, a merchant seaman during the war, and a reader for a film company. This is his first published poem.

JOSEPH WHITT is a young Philadelphia writer.

ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume VIII, Number 3

Spring, 1948

WILLIAM GOYEN:

Four American Portraits as Elegy

I. Charity

Oh you Charity, Texas! You've done no good to any of these, but they can't forget you if they tried.

Every frozen morning for awhile in early winter you had a thin little winter moon slung like a slice of a silver Rocky Ford cantaloupe over the sawmill; and then I would go out to the well in the yard and snap off the silver thorns of ice from the windlass and pull up the morning water and stand and look over across the fields at you and know that in all the kitchen woodstoves they were making baking powder biscuits big as a fist. Then all the chickens and guineas of Charity would be crowing and calling and all the cattle lowing and the Charity dogs barking . . . and in that crystal and moon-haunted moment I would wonder for the thousandth time what the mystery of Ganchions and Starnes was all about and what was wrong in Charity.

And on a spring Saturday you would be sitting there in your place in Texas "grinnin like a Chessy Cat" as Aunty said, so happy and hopping with all the people come in from the fields and farms to handle you and claim you and gather round in you — there was

Glee Ramey and Sweet Yarbrough and Sing Browder and Ola Wilkerson the music teacher ("One day a little bubble will break in your throat honey and then you'll have a beautiful voice. Just wait for the little bubble"), and all the Grants who had to ford White Rock Creek to get in from their blackland farm . . . and families all standing together here and there or carrying out oats and feed and cartons of Pet's Milk from the Commissary.

And in the still, clear dusks I remember especially a voice that sounded in you, Charity, calling "Swimma-a-a! Swimma-a-a-a! Come in 'fore dark!" — Aunty Starnes calling Sue Emma Starnes, my cousin and her daughter. Seems like all my life since, in any place and for no reason at all, just when it is getting dark I will suddenly be hearing a voice calling "Swimma-a-a-a! Swimma-a-a-a! Come in 'fore dark!"; and I wish we were all together in Charity again.

You had a little patch of woods behind Aunty's house that I remember. It had bearded trees that clicked and ticked and cracked and cheeped and twittered, and lichen grew on an ancient fence like an old old sheep's coat; and stroking it with my hand once made me feel how old and lustreless and knap-worn you might be, Charity, and all the people in you, just as Aunty said. But to see an old live-oak drop a single young little leaf twinkling to the ground was to know that there was still the shining new thing of myself in the world and I would be full of some joy and yearning for something, bigger than Aunty's hopelessness, bigger than Granny Ganchion's agony, than all Charity . . . until suddenly I would hear the groaning of the cistern wheel back at Aunty's house, calling me back, and I would go; and wonder why the Ganchions and the Starnes could never love each other . . . and I half of each.

You were such a place of leaves, Charity; and I think the first time I was ever aware of you as any place in the world was in a deep and sad and heavy autumn. Then it was that you seemed to have been built of leaf and twig and bark, as a bird's nest is woven and thatched together, and had been used and used until you were withered; then you were shaken and thrown down into these ruins. All the summer of anything which ever had touched or known you seemed despoiled and was rubble that autumn, and I suddenly knew myself as something, moving among these remnants. (Oh all the leaves I have known in you, Charity! — the shining leathery castorbean leaves, with the chickens cool under them in the summer or sheltered from the rain (oh the sound of the rain on the castorbean

leaves at Aunty's, how forever after Folner's funeral it reminded me of it.) And the lace and grace of chinaberry leaves in a summer breeze; and those of the vines that had a name I did not know and hung, full of bees or busy hummingbirds all after the little sweet white bloom on it, over the long porch at Aunty's. Then of course the live-oak leaves, that were flaked over Charity River Bottom; and muscadine leaves, and sycamore leaves, and the leaves on go-to-sleep flowers. In the autumn of one year, every leaf that had ever hung on any Charity tree in spring and summer lay fallen upon the ground.)

You had Aunty's house, Charity, sitting on the little rising piece of land. To get to it, if I had been at Granny Ganchion's wild house across the tracks and across the town, I would just start walking toward the sawmill, down Main Street (which was really just the Highway named this for the brief time it ran through you and became a little piece of you) under all the Charity trees. I would pass the only stores, looking across Main Street at each other; and ahead of me would stretch the Highway, going to pretty close little towns like Lufkin or Lovelady, and behind me it wound to faraway places, huge and full of many people, like Dallas or Santone. Then I would turn off at the Grace Methodist Church, go on past the Tanners' old place with the twisted cedar, in whose branches I had been as often as any bird, that had a forked limb like a chicken's wishbone, where once I slipped and hung like Absalom until Mrs. Tanner came running to save me; then there would be the sawmill, where my father worked — and came home with sawdust in his pockets and shoes — that had a long, legged sawdust conveyor sitting like a praying mantis. And next would come the graveyard, nothing but names and dates and enormous grasshoppers vaulting over the graves; and the little negro shacks next, with black faces at the windows or some good old negro sitting on his porch or calling to little negro children playing in the rain puddles. Finally, I would take the little sandy road, and if I suddenly looked up I would see Aunty's house looking at me and calling me back to it.

It was a big, wide, live house with a long hall running right straight through the middle of it, and had many good people in it, Aunty, Uncle Jimbob, Sue Emma, Maidie, Mama, Little Sister and my father, who never seemed really to be in this house but would sit on the porch looking across the tracks towards Granny Ganchion's, his mother's. There was always that wagon in the field; it had lost a wheel and was standing broken at the back and wrenched to one side. A family of chipmunks lived and bred and lived on in it. Close

to the well was the baby buggy, ragged and decrepit, like the sloughed off husk of abandoned infancy, in which many babies had been fitted and ridden round; and later, when there were no more babies in the house, the children who had lain in it had played with it, recklessly, as if disdainful of any infancy, until Aunty had captured it again and planted some Hen-and-Chickens in it. If it was summer, there were hot peppers and tomatoes and string beans in the garden and Old Maids and Petunias everywhere; and the speckled yellow canna, ringed by an old rotted tire, bloomed brightly from its corner in the yard. If it was winter, the cattle would be standing in a stare in the field, dull and motionless; and the ragged hens would be huddled drooping by the barn. Then it seemed that summer might not ever come again.

You had other places, Charity — the little Bijou (said "Byejo" by everybody) Theatre, bright and rowdy, where Jack Nesbitt played, thumping his wooden leg, the piano for the show — mostly one piece called "Whispering" over and over again. And you had the City Hotel — but that burned and brought all Charity to it in nightgowns, and out of its wreckage they carried an old drummer burned in the praying shape they found him in. Then there was the Post Office where the faces of Guy and Lucy and old Bill Trow were framed in each window like a little mantle array of family photographs as I passed, going to get the mail. And there was the Racket Store and Sam Barnes' Dry Goods Store that had the smell of cretonne and gingham and Union Jack Overalls in it, and old Mrs. Huffman with a pair of scissors hanging on a black ribbon round her neck saying "Kin I help ye, Boy Ganchion?"

It seems like the young ones were always packing their suitcases to come back to you or to leave you again, and the old ones sitting and waiting, taking the young ones back and keeping them as long as they could — they at their standoffish distance of never belonging there or anywhere that broke the old ones' hearts that never said a brokenhearted word — till they had to stand on the front porch again and watch them, the Follners and the Sanchas and the Sue Emmas and the Boys, going through the gate to the Highway — away again, who knew where? There was just no future in a little town like you for people young and ready. But the old ones sat right there with you, Charity, holding your dying hand, rocking and wailing or counting their secret futile beads of hope.

That's a little picture of you, Charity. You've done no good to any of these. But they can't forget you if they tried.

II. Aunty

On the breezeway at her house in the summer afternoons, she held the flyswatter like a sceptre and Uncle Jimbob sat poorly and silent on a little barrel, and all of them just sitting there with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to dress up for, just sitting. And then, hearing feet on the road and running to the kitchen window, she shouted "The gypsies!" and all of them were at the windows, watching the bright gypsies jingle down the road, bright and quick and going someplace, and none of them saying a word, all of them at the window, looking through the window . . .

Her well was right in the house at the end of the long back porch, next to the indoor privy (there was a crooked one outside beyond the chickens, but in it were hornets). This was the only magic thing, the dark enchanted cistern that held the beautiful voice prisoner, down below the shimmering water. When you cried down hello! hello! it answered back only oh! oh! in a wailing young girl's voice. (The wheel is broken at the cistern, the rope at the well is ravelled and rotten, the bucket rusted and leaky; and there is never a hand on the windlass now.)

And in the front yard in the late summer afternoons when the children played barefoot upon the stickerburrs, all of her kin sat rocking round her on the porch and she spat snuff into the front yard and rocked and said, "This is an old house. That was poor Mama and Papa's room there. I remember poor Mama and Papa sleeping in that front room when all of us was children." And the children in the front yard running barefooted over the stickerburrs, singing "Go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows, for we have gained this day." Or, in the game of Statue, all the Starnes and Ganchion young thrown into frozen poses, bent-over mourning shapes or vain or heroic arabesques — so that in memory they might seem like a pavilion of ruined statuaries. Folner even then would cheat a pose into some careless blasé stance, but he could not ransom his face.

The little train would go by in front of Aunty's house and stop all rocking and any game, and where, where was it going? And who was the wild-faced man in the dirty cap who waved the gloved-black hand from the engine as it passed? And what was he trying to say to all of them, to the children playing games in the big front yard round the speckled canna and the big ones rocking on the long

gallery in the swing and wicker rockers? Here they sat and ran as he passed, and oh who *was* he, this leering, magical terrible man who waved the great gloved-black hand at them from the little engine as it passed, going where? coming from where?

"And oh," she said, "we ain't got a chanct, we ain't got a chanct in this world. Jimbob's down in the back and got hemorrhoids and a stone in his bladder and cain't carpenter or work at the roundhouse or even lift a good size squash; and the garden's dry and burnin up in the burnin sun and we cain't buy feed for the cows and chickens and I don't know what we'll ever do, just set here on this porch and rock and spit until we die one day and be buried by our poor relations. And Swimma finishin high school next year and then where does she go and what does she do? If she goes wild like that Sancha Ganchion I'd rather see her dead, I declare to you all and to the good Lord I'd rather see her dead. Ought to have her a business course in Palestine, but who on earth can afford to pay for the kind of course she needs at Miz Cratty's Select Business College in Palestine? And Maidie marrying Fred that runs a street-car in Dallas and who can live off the money they pay you to run a street-car in Dallas? And this infernal little town of Charity dead and rottin away with only the Sampsons havin the money and all the rest of us poor as niggers and our teeth bad and my side hurtin day and night with the change a life and no money to see a specialist in Dallas (Jimbob, Jimbob, the pigs is in the sorghum again, but don't run. Walk, Jimbob, mind your back. My Lord, guess we'll all die in a pile right here, with the pigs in the sorghum and nobody carin, nobody carin)."

"Aunty, why does the Widow Barnes just sit on her porch?"

Oh all the porches in the little towns had them rocking on them, sitting, sitting; and the crops burning up under the burning sun and the teeth going bad and stones in the bladders and the town rotting away and no place to go, no place to go.

The Ku Klux Klan went riding riding. You saw the fiery cross on Rob Hill in the summer nighttime and you knew some poor crazy nigger was going to burn, was going to run shrieking down Main Street in tar and feathers.

"Aunty Aunty what is that noise by the woodstove?"

"Be still, Boy. It's only the rats in your Aunty's woodbox."

"Oh the sad sad days when all of us was young," she said, and spat and rocked. "You know when Mama passed on, she left me all her old crockery. There was some big pitchers with roses handpainted on

them. And then the old nigger Mary Bird who cleaned for Mama for years just took them all, saying they was rightfully hers because she was the only one that ever was kind to Mama and rightfully deserved them. Everything we ever had is gone. What they don't steal away from us we lose by drouth or a plague or a rottin away. Life is hard and only sufferin and it does no good to any of us and how we ever bear it I don't know. But we have it to do and we've got to be strong about it and try not to be blue about it and go on in trial and tribulation. But how life changes and the things that happen to us in this world are like stories to be read and I declare the great God don't even know sometimes the dreadful things that happen to us; and oh Boy Boy, let me push back the hair from your eye. That's why you always frown so, got your hair in your eye. Goin to be wrinkled as old man Nay down by the sawmill, worst suit a hair I ever saw. Come to me . . . you're not a Ganchion, even though that's your name, there's nary a Ganchion streak in you, never was, you're a Starnes in blood and marrow. Old Hannah Ganchion's no more deaf than that cow out yonder in the pasture. Just don't want to hear what all the people of Charity say about her and her hateful children. The Ganchions are the blight of Charity, worse than boll weevils, worse than a pest a hoppers, the Devil incarnit, despise the day they all come here from Sour Lake, the rawsin bellies. Don't frown so, Boy, don't worry so; come here let me push back the hair from your eye . . ."

Oh you ain't got a chanct, you ain't got a chanct in this world. You are down in the back and got hemorrhoids and a stone in your bladder and you can't carpenter or work at the roundhouse and the garden's dry and burnin up in the burnin sun and you can't buy feed for the cows and chickens and I don't know what you'll ever do, just sit there on the porch and rock and spit and die one day and be buried by your poor relations. And the infernal little town dead and rottin away and all of you poor as niggers and your teeth bad and your sides hurtin day and night and no money to see a doctor in Dallas.

(And Jimbob, Jimbob the pigs is in the sorghum, but don't run, walk, Jimbob. Mind your back, Jimbob. My God guess we'll all die in a pile right here, with the pigs in the sorghum and nobody carin.)

Nobody carin.

III. Folner

He was sad and cheap and wasted, a doll left in the rain, a face smeared and melted a little, soft and wasted and ruined a little. Where did he go when he crept away in the nighttime, staying sometimes for two or three days, then returning spent and wasted and ruined a little in his face?

He would come across town with dock and wild buckwheat in his blond hair, and below his eyes the blue rims of circles, the color of eggplant, would shine on his flushed cheeks.

He chose a show to go away with, finally, out of east Texas because I think it was the only bright and glittering thing in the world he could find. Of all the ways and things in the world, he chose a show, with dancing women and lights and spangles. Because he couldn't bear the world without a song and dance and a burnished cane. He was wild like a creature, the way he crept in as if he went on paws like an animal out of the brush, a kind of hunted, creeping thing in his gait. He was for the beautiful evil world and he let it ravage him to ash, he gave his life for it. He went all the way. He knew what he was and endured it all the way, to the bitter bitter end, burned down to ash by it, charred down to clinker.

They told about the trunks of costumes that came back to Charity after he took all those sleeping pills in a hotel in San Antonio . . . all the trunks out in the barn loft, filled with rhinestones and spangles and boafeathers and holding the wicked smell of grease-paint. I rummaged there as if I thought somewhere I might suddenly come upon some explanation of his mystery. And once I found a note in one of the costume trunks. On it was written "Oh beautiful boy you have broken my heart."

Brave and noble, Folner? Clean and fine? Boy Scouts and the Epworth League and all that, Folner? Pshaw! You didn't want to flicker around east Texas, you wanted to *blaze* in the world, to sparkle, to shine, to glisten in the great evil world. You wanted tinsel and tinfoil and spangle and roman candle glamour, to be gawdy and bright as a plaster ruby and a dollar diamond. Was that right? Of course not. Wrong? Wrong, wrong. Who has a *choice*, really? All of it was wrong from the beginning, from the corrupted foetus; the poisoned womb, from the galled cradle (endlessly rocking for you and me, for you and me).

You were tinsel all the way, beautiful boy Folner, all the rotten way. Once I said, building a chicken coop, "I want to make this

right." "Nothing is made right around here, Boy," you said. "Everything is crooked and warped and twisted." And walked, lost and cheaply grieved, away.

When your corpse came back to Charity from San Antonio that deep and leaf-haunted autumn, Folner, they embalmed it at Jim Thornton's Funeral Establishment (which was also a cleaning and pressing shop when nobody was dead). There was a gray hearse. All of us went to the Grace Methodist Church and the Starnes and the Ganchions filled up two pews. We sang "Beulah Land" (You would have loved that . . . "for I am drinking from the fountain that never shall run dry (praise God!); I'm feasting on the manna of a bountiful supply . . .") A few women kept fainting. Auntie sat hating you, even dead. Even laid in a coffin she despised you like a snake. Granny Ganchion sat like a sick bird, humped and bitten, and gazed into your cheap coffin. Oh her hands! — boney and knotted at the knuckles — how she moved them round her goitered throat like a starved woman's. (Do you know what she wore, Folner? A great yellow hat with a boafeather round it, and on her neck was a pair of rubyred beads. What voices were howling round in her head as she sat there, gazing at you in your cheap coffin?) Your brother Christy sat out in front of the church in the car, afraid to come in, ashamed and sullen and wretched. As we marched by your coffin to look in at you for the last time, I saw your wasted doll-in-the-rain face and I thought I could hear you whisper to me, "Make it gay, Boy, make it bright, Boy!" And no one in that whole Grace Methodist Church, or in all of Charity, or in the whole wide world but you and I knew I dropped a little purple spangle into your cheap coffin as I passed by. It was a little purple spangle stolen from a gypsy costume in one of your trunks in Granny Ganchion's barn. You loved it! It was put in the earth with you.

Oh nothing *is* made right around here, Folner. Everything is crooked and warped and twisted. But glisten down there! Glitter and shine! Carry that purple spangle into Hell, where you will surely go, and gay it up down there, gay it up!

Mein kind, wir waren kinder . . .

IV. Granny Ganchion

Now Granny Ganchion, when you went down in the root cellar so often I know what happened down there. I know what the Tatzlwurm said to you down there, sitting among all your pre-

serves — the figs and apricots and pears like jewels shining in the bottles — like the aborted foetuses of all your hopes. I know you fondled and counted that string of rubyred beads like a rosary. I know the Tatzlwurm said to you, “Hannah Ganchion, you got nothing in the world but a few hundred jars of rotten preserves and an old pair of rubyred beads you’re too scared to wear up above out of this root cellar. The rest is toil and labor and no love and no brightness anywhere, only a house full of ruined children. And an old emasculated husband (“All right, Hannah, then I swear to God I’ll go downtown to the whorehouse!” And the time I heard the whores in the city jail, blessed damozels leaning their poilu heads out the golden windows singing “Bless them all, bless them all, the long and the short and the tall . . .”) sneaking over to niggertown right from your own bed at midnight, while every month there’s a nigger tarred and feathered and beaten on Rob Hill because he’s raped an east Texas white woman. (In the barn, once, Christy stood close to me and said in a low dangerous voice, “You ain’t a man in east Texas, Boy, until you’ve had a nigger woman.”)

And I can hear you protest to the Tatzlwurm in the root cellar, Granny Ganchion, in mock pride, “I got my children and I got my husband, who’ve been good to me . . .”

And the Tatzlwurm flashes and says “That’s a lie and a fairy tale! Sancha ran away with a married man from Huntsville and never wrote you a line and you never knew where in the wide world she was until one day you seen her comin up the road with her suitcase in her hand. And when she came to the door you said ‘Can you be Sancha my own daughter, with trimmed eyebrows and long hair falling down your back and colored fingernails? Oh where have you been Sancha my child, oh how long? how long?’”

“Sancha is in Austin workin at the capitol and straightened out now and going to marry a good man.”

“Sancha is a whore and you know it and the preserves know it and the rubyred beads know it.”

“A mother don’t never *know*. A mother don’t never really say what she knows to herself.”

“And your son Folner’s done strange things like going away with a show to New York City and everyone says there was something wrong with him. The time he came home in patent leather shoes and even had a permanent wave in his blond hair proved it. And what happened around Charity and the commotion he caused among the young boys, and everyone saying he acted just like a woman. And

at the depot when they took his used up, burnt out body off the train, people of Charity saw box after box of costumes with spangles and rhinestones and boafeathers and said, looking in, 'Can this be all that's left of Folner Ganchion to come back from San Antone: spangles and rhinestones and boafeathers?'"

"Them was all lies in a little town. Folner was a good boy who wanted the world."

"Like you, Hannah Ganchion. Your children are *you*, taking the world and not hiding in the root cellar. Folner took the world and had it in his time and got his death from too much of it. Christy took all the world in a bottle, drank and drank down the world — until he got himself poisoned almost to death from some cheap rotten bootleg and now goes crippled because of it. And you know how Sancha came home one time 'to stay' and lasted three days with tantrums out on the porch and cryin convulsions in the privy and then packed her suitcase again and stood at the front door shoutin, 'Why should *I* wash over a rickety old washstand covered with oilcloth and ruin my complexion with lava soap and go out through the cold and rain to the privy when I can have Princess Pat Preparations and a pink ruffled boudoir in a suit all my own *with adjoinin bath* at the Ambassador Hotel in Austin?' And left in the middle of the night goin down the railroad track toward the Highway — because she had to have the world."

And then the Tatzlwurm, fat and shining green and warted over with lechery and wickedness, coiling fat and grinning in your root cellar among the jars of foetal preserves, said, gravely, "That's why you love the pair of rubyred beads, Hannah Ganchion. Because when you wore them, long long ago, everything was going to be all right, as pretty and as passionate and as sparkling as that pair of rubyred beads. But it's not turned out that way, Hannah Ganchion. So you just go around holding on to them like a rosary and sneakin down here to count the red beads among the jars of rotten preserves."

And then I know the Tatzlwurm's head reared up wild and terrible, and he bellowed in a fierce voice, "You accursed old Phèdre, what did you do away back in the budding groves of your maidenhood, what did you do, what heinous, wanton crime?"

And as you flinched and broke and fell in a clump in the root cellar among your jars of rancid preserves, the rubyred beads rattled like pitiless little rocks against each other and would not, you knew, ever send away a single rosary prayer of hope beyond you and the root cellar and the Tatzlwurm.

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH:

Mythology

Lucky the myth
that springs, like flower
from branch, from a truth
compelling faith
as it swells to fruit.

Bad cess to the faith
that's pinned to a myth
like paper flower
on the balsam bough
that breeds no fruit
and draws no sap
from any truth.

A city child
for long will think
electric fires
and Bethlehem stars
like roses bloom
on the Christmas tree.
He'll think that apples
and motor cars
are sired with coin
by the local dealer
on the factory.

The farmer's boy
knows by what sweat
the furrow's drawn
and dung is spread,
how corn is seeded,
tractor-weeded,
by what faith heeded
and harvested.

Bay Window

Blind eyes of a child and hard heart
 Sunk in his own remote concerns
 Passed on to be known after years, years,
 The strange sight of his mother's tears.

Image of peace in the flooding light
 With crossed feet and folded hands
 Where dripping ice through the window gleamed
 And potted greenness baked and steamed.

No heart's lesion after years
 Of tender probing might reveal
 But the mere thought of a child's going
 Would set her woman's tears to flowing.

A child's going, a child's return
 And this child drowned in his own cares
 Heeded her less than the stable's smell
 Or the upward drag of the attic stairs.

Fragment of a Canto

and came

Rounding a gentle hillslope on a plain
 Well watered and blue-rimmed against the blast
 Of desert or of ocean, where were set
 Grovewise for meditation and delight
 Chestnut and oak. Then swift to him I turned.
 "Whence comes this torment? for the merest fleece
 Over the far blue ridges moveless floats
 While here each mounded greenness writhes and bows
 Like a man doubled up with pain, and darkness
 Seals up each neighboring giant in his separate
 Seething funnel. Is it from sea or desert
 This black tornado strikes, and how has it passed
 The azure outposts unchallenged, unheralded?"
 And he: "Look once again how each spire whips

To his own point of the compass and is deformed
 His own peculiar way. There are as many
 Patterns of ruin as there are desperate wills
 Driving each soul to fury." Then I to him:
 "And so these seeming trees . . . and so this storm . . ."
 And he: "You have seen!" And silent we passed on.

Mask to Mask

My quarrel with you is that you come
 So like a figure in a dream.
 You are so deep-daubed in corpse-light
 Your features waver and decompose
 In crawling layers of phosphor sheen
 And hang upon my laboring sight
 A grinning mask upon a screen.

No question all this spectral stuff
 From your own bowels and blood is drawn
 To be your ghostly ectoplasm.
 No question but that you must use
 Some portion of self to make secure
 A deeper self against abuse.
 We keep in hiding every one.

So for the world the ritual mask.
 But we two! goblins face to face
 Across the table making sounds
 And with a carnival circumstance
 Touching our glasses fumblingly,
 Yet mask to mask set down to stare
 Each other out of countenance!

Corslet and helmet these may seem
 To those doped spirits that confuse
 The truth of daylight with the dream
 This mask you count on to defend
 Your guts, like mine, is painted cloth,
 As one slash of the knife would show,
 My friend, if you were not my friend.

FRANCIS FERGUSSON:

Oedipus Rex: The Tragic Rhythm of Action *

“ . . . quel secondo regno
dove l'umano spirito si purga.”
—Purgatorio, Canto I.

I suppose there can be little doubt that *Oedipus Rex* is a crucial instance of drama, if not *the* play which best exemplifies this art in its essential nature and completeness. It owes its position partly to the fact that Aristotle founded his definitions upon it. But since the time of Aristotle it has been imitated, rewritten and discussed by many different generations, not only of dramatists, but also of moralists, psychologists, historians, and other students of human nature and destiny.

Though the play is thus generally recognized as an archetype, there has been little agreement about its meaning or its form. It seems to beget, in every period, a different interpretation and a different dramaturgy. From the Seventeenth Century until the end of the Eighteenth, a Neoclassic and Rationalist interpretation of *Oedipus*, of Greek Tragedy, and of Aristotle, was generally accepted; and upon this interpretation was based the dramaturgy of Corneille and Racine. Nietzsche, under the inspiration of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, developed a totally different view of it, and thence a different theory of drama. These two views of Greek Tragedy, Racine's and Nietzsche's, still provide indispensable perspectives upon *Oedipus*. They show a great deal about modern principles of dramatic composition; and they show, when compared, how central and how essential Sophocles' drama is.

In our day a conception of *Oedipus* seems to be developing which is neither that of Racine nor that of Nietzsche. This view is based upon the studies which the Cambridge School — Frazer, Cornford, Harrison, Murray — made of the ritual origins of Greek Tragedy. It also owes a great deal to the current interest in myth as a way of ordering human experience. *Oedipus*, we now see, is both myth and ritual. It assumes and employs these two ancient ways of understanding and representing human experience, which are prior to the arts and sciences

* A chapter from a book-in-progress, *The Idea of a Theatre*. The passages from Sophocles are Mr. Fergusson's translation.

and philosophies of modern times. To understand it (it now appears) we must endeavor to recapture the habit of significant make-believe, of the direct perception of action, which underlies Sophocles' theatre.

If *Oedipus* is to be understood in this way, then we shall have to revise our ideas of Sophocles' dramaturgy. The notion of Aristotle's theory of drama, and hence of Greek dramaturgy, which still prevails (in spite of such studies as Butcher's of the *Poetics*), is largely colored by Neoclassic taste and rationalistic habits of mind. If we are to take it that Sophocles was imitating action *before* theory, instead of after it, like Racine, then both the elements and the form of his composition appear in a new light.

In the present essay the attempt is made to draw the deductions, for Sophocles' theatre and dramaturgy, which the present view of *Oedipus* implies. We shall find that the various traditional views of this play are not so much wrong as partial.

Oedipus, Myth and Play

When Sophocles came to write his play he had the myth of Oedipus to start with. Laius and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes, are told by the oracle that their son will grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. The infant, his feet pierced, is left on Mount Kitharon to die. But a shepherd finds him and takes care of him; at last gives him to another shepherd, who takes him to Corinth, and there the King and Queen bring him up as their own son. But Oedipus—"Clubfoot"—is plagued in his turn by the oracle; he hears that he is fated to kill his father and marry his mother; and to escape that fate he leaves Corinth never to return. On his journey he meets an old man with his servants; gets into a dispute with him, and kills him and all his followers. He comes to Thebes at the time when the Sphinx is preying upon that City; solves the riddle which the Sphinx propounds, and saves the City. He marries the widowed Queen, Jocasta; has several children by her; rules prosperously for many years. But when Thebes is suffering under a plague and a drought, the oracle reports that the gods are angry because Laius' slayer is unpunished. Oedipus, as King, undertakes to find him; discovers that he is himself the culprit, and that Jocasta is his own mother. He blinds himself and goes into exile. From this time forth he becomes a sort of sacred relic, like the bones of a saint; perilous, but "good medicine" for the community that possesses him. He dies, at last, at Athens, in a grove sacred to the Eumenides, female spirits of fertility and night.

It is obvious even from this sketch that the myth, which covers several generations, has as much narrative material as *Gone with the Wind*. It is the way of myths that they generate whole progenies of elaborations and varying versions. They are so suggestive, seem to say so much, yet so mysteriously, that the mind cannot rest content with any single form, but must add, or interpret, or simplify — reduce to terms which the reason can accept. Mr. William Troy suggests that “what is possibly most in order at the moment is a thorough-going refurbishment of the medieval four-fold method of interpretation, which was first developed, it will be recalled, for just such a purpose — to make at least partially available to the reason that complex of human problems which are embedded, deep and imponderable, in the Myth.”* It is my thesis that Sophocles, in his play, succeeded in preserving the suggestive mystery of the Oedipus *myth*, while presenting it in a wonderfully unified dramatic form; and this drama has all the dimensions which the fourfold method was intended to explore.

Everyone knows that when Sophocles planned the plot of the play itself, he started almost at the end of the story, when the plague descends upon the City of Thebes, which Oedipus and Jocasta had been ruling with great success for a number of years. The action of the play takes less than a day, and consists of Oedipus’ quest for Laius’ slayer; — his consulting the Oracle of Apollo, his examination of the Prophet Tiresias, and of a series of witnesses, ending with the old Shepherd who gave him to the King and Queen of Corinth. The play ends when Oedipus is unmistakably revealed as himself the culprit.

At this literal level, the play is intelligible as a murder mystery. Oedipus takes the role of District Attorney; and when he at last convicts himself, we have a *coup de théâtre*, of unparalleled excitement. But no one who sees or reads the play can rest content with its literal coherence. Questions as to its meaning arise at once: Is Oedipus really guilty, or simply a victim of the gods, of his famous complex, of fate, of original sin? How much did he know, all along? How much did Jocasta know? — The first, and most deeply instinctive effort of the mind, when confronted with this play, is to endeavor to reduce its meanings to some set of rational categories.

The critics of the Age of Reason tried to understand it as a fable of the enlightened moral will, in accordance with the philosophy of

* “Myth, Method and the Future.” By William Troy. *Chimera*, Spring, 1946.

that time. Voltaire's version of the play, following Corneille, and his comments upon it, may be taken as typical. He sees it as essentially a struggle between a strong and righteous Oedipus, and the malicious and very human gods, aided and abetted by the corrupt priest Tiresias; he makes it an anti-religious tract, with an unmistakable moral to satisfy the needs of the discursive intellect. In order to make Oedipus sympathetic to his audience, he elides, as much as possible, the incest motif; and he adds an irrelevant love story. He was aware that his version and interpretation were not Sophocles', but with the complacent provinciality of his period he attributes the differences to the darkness of the age in which *Sophocles* lived.

Other attempts to rationalize *Oedipus Rex* are subtler than Voltaire's, and take us farther toward an understanding of the play. Freud's reduction of the play to the concepts of his psychology reveals a great deal, opens up perspectives which we are still exploring. If one reads *Oedipus* in the light of Fustel de Coulanges's *The Ancient City*, one may see it as the expression of the ancient patriarchal religion of the Greeks. And other interpretations of the play, theological, philosophical, historical, are available, none of them wrong, but all partial, all reductions of Sophocles' masterpiece to an alien set of categories. For the peculiar virtue of Sophocles' presentation of the myth is that it preserves the ultimate mystery by focusing upon the tragic human at a level beneath or prior to any rationalization whatever. The plot is so arranged that we see the action as it were illumined from many sides at once.

By starting the play at the end of the story, and showing on stage only the last crucial episode in Oedipus' life, Sophocles reveals the past and present action of the protagonist together; and in each other's light, past and present are at last felt as one. Oedipus' quest for the slayer of Laius becomes a quest for the hidden reality of his own past; and as that slowly comes into focus, like repressed material under psychoanalysis—with sensory and emotional immediacy, yet in the light of acceptance and understanding—his immediate quest also reaches its end; he comes to see himself (the savior of the City) and the guilty one, the plague of Thebes, at once and at one.

This presentation of the myth of Oedipus constitutes, in one sense, an interpretation of it. What Sophocles saw as the essence of Oedipus' nature and destiny, is not what Seneca or Dryden or Cocteau saw; and one may grant that even Sophocles did not exhaust the possibilities of the materials of the myth. But it is my contention that

Sophocles' version of the myth does not constitute a "reduction" in the same sense as the rest.

I have said that the action which Sophocles shows is a quest, the quest for Laius' slayer; and that as Oedipus' past is unrolled before us his whole life is seen as a kind of quest for his true nature and destiny. But since the object of this quest is not clear until the end, the seeking action takes many forms, as its object appears in different lights. The object indeed, — the final perception, the "truth," — looks so different at the end from what it did at the beginning, that Oedipus' action itself may seem not a *quest*, but its opposite, a *flight*. Thus it would be hard to say simply that Oedipus either succeeds or fails. He succeeds; but his success is his undoing. He fails to find what, in one way, he sought, yet from another point of view his search is brilliantly successful. The same ambiguities surround his effort to discover who and what he is. He seems to find that he is nothing; yet thereby finds himself. And what of his relation to the gods? His quest may be regarded as a heroic attempt to escape their decrees, or as an attempt, based upon some deep natural faith, to discover what their wishes are, and what true obedience would be. In one sense Oedipus suffers forces he can neither control nor understand, the puppet of fate; yet at the same time he wills and intelligently intends his every move.

It is my contention that the meaning or spiritual content of the play is not to be sought by trying to resolve such ambiguities as these. The spiritual content of the play is the tragic action which Sophocles directly presents; and this action is in its essence *zweideutig*: triumph and destruction, darkness and enlightenment, mourning and rejoicing, at any moment we care to consider it. But this action has also a shape: a beginning, middle and end, in time . . . It moves, in Mr. Burke's phrase, "from Purpose, to Passion, to Perception." This is the rhythm, or shape, of the action of *Oedipus*. The play as a whole starts with the intelligible purpose of finding Laius' slayer; we suffer the successive facts which destroy that purpose as we had conceived it; from this suffering and uncertainty the final perception comes: we see the slayer in a totally new light. Each scene in the play (smaller figures repeated, with variations, in the movement of the whole) moves also in the Tragic Rhythm, from Purpose to Passion to Perception.

In order to illustrate these points in more detail, it is convenient to examine the scene between Oedipus and Tiresias with the chorus following it. This scene, being early in the play (the big agon) presents, as it were, a preview of the whole action and constitutes a clear and complete example of action in the Tragic Rhythm.

Hero and Scapegoat: The Agon between Oedipus and Tiresias

The scene between Oedipus and Tiresias comes after the opening sections of the play. We have seen the citizens of Thebes beseeching their King to find some way to lift the plague which is on the City. We have had Oedipus' entrance (majestic, but for his tell-tale limp) to reassure them, and we have heard the report which Creon brings from the Delphic Oracle: that the cause of the plague is the unpunished murder of Laius, the former King. Oedipus offers rewards to anyone who will reveal the culprit, and he threatens with dire punishment anyone who conceals or protects him. In the mean time he decides, with the enthusiastic assent of the chorus, to summon Tiresias as the first witness.

Tiresias is that suffering seer whom Sophocles uses in *Antigone* also to reveal a truth which other mortals find it hard and uncomfortable to see. He is physically blind, but Oedipus and chorus alike assume that if anyone can see who the culprit is, it is Tiresias, with his uncanny inner vision of the future. As Tiresias enters, led by a boy, the chorus greets him in these words:

CHORUS: But the man to convict him is here. Look: they are
bringing the one human in whom the truth is native,
the godlike seer.

At this point in the play Oedipus is at the opposite pole of experience from Tiresias; Hero, monarch, helmsman of the State; the solver of the Sphinx's riddle, the triumphant human. He explains his purpose in the following proud clear terms:

OEDIPUS: O Tiresias, you know all things: what may be told, and
the unspeakable: things of earth and things of heaven.
You understand the City (though you do not see it)
in its present mortal illness — from which to save us
and protect us, we find, Lord, none but you. For you
must know, in case you haven't heard it from the
messengers, that Apollo, when we asked him, told us
there was one way only with this plague: to discover
Laius' slayers, and put them to death or send them into
exile. Therefore you must not jealously withhold your
omens, whether of birds or other visionary way, but
save yourself and the City — save me, save all of us —
from the defilement of the dead. In your hand we
are. There is no handsomer work for a man, than to
bring, with what he has, what help he can.

This speech is the prologue of the scene, and the basis of the agon or struggle which follows. This struggle in effect analyzes Oedipus' purpose; places it in a wider context, reveals it as faulty and dubious. At the end of the scene Oedipus loses his original purpose altogether, and suffers a wave of rage and fear, which will have to be rationalized in its turn before he can pull himself together and act again with a clear purpose.

In the first part of the struggle, Oedipus takes the initiative, while Tiresias, on the defensive, tries to avoid replying:

TIRESIAS: Oh, oh. How terrible to know, when nothing can come of knowing! Indeed, I had lost the vision of these things, or I should never have come.

OEDIPUS: What things? . . . In what discouragement have you come to us here!

TIR. : Let me go home. I shall endure this most easily, and so will you, if you do as I say.

OED. : But what you ask is not right. To refuse your word is disloyalty to the City that has fed you.

TIR. : But I see that your demands are exorbitant, and lest I too suffer such a —

OED. : For the sake of the gods, if you know, don't turn away! Speak to us, we are your suppliants here.

TIR. : None of you understands. But I — I never will tell my misery. Or yours.

OED. : What are you saying? You know, but tell us nothing? You intend treachery to us, and death to the City?

TIR. : I intend to grieve neither myself nor you. Why then do you try to know? You will never learn from me.

OED. : Ah, evil old man! You would anger a stone! You will say *nothing*? Stand futile, speechless before us?

TIR. : You curse my temper, but you don't see the one that dwells in you; no, you must blame me.

OED. : And who would *not* lose his temper, if he heard you utter your scorn of the City?

TIR. : It will come. Silent though I be.

OED. : Since it will come, it is your duty to inform me.

TIR. : I shall say no more. Now, if you like, rage to your bitter heart's content.

OED. : Very well: in my "rage" I shall hold back nothing **which I now begin to see**. I think you planned that deed, even performed it, though not with your own hands. If you could see, I should say that the work was yours alone.

In the last speech quoted, Oedipus changes his tack, specifying his purpose differently; he accuses Tiresias, and that makes Tiresias attack. In the next part of the fight the opponents trade blow for blow:

- TIR. : You would? I charge you, abide by the decree you uttered: from this day forth, speak neither to these present, nor to me, unclean as you are, polluter of the earth!
- OED. : You have the impudence to speak out words like these! And now how do you expect to escape?
- TIR. : I have escaped. The truth strengthens and sustains me.
- OED. : Who taught you the truth? Not your prophet's art.
- TIR. : You did: you force me against my will to speak.
- OED. : Speak what? Speak again, that I may understand better.
- TIR. : *Didn't* you understand? Or are you goading me?
- OED. : I can't say I really grasp it: speak again.
- TIR. : I say you are the murderer of the man whose murderer you seek.
- OED. : You won't be glad to have uttered that curse twice.
- TIR. : Must I say more, so you may rage the more?
- OED. : As much as you like — all is senseless.
- TIR. : I say you do not know your own wretchedness, nor see in what shame you live with those you love.
- OED. : Do you think you can say that forever with impunity?
- TIR. : If the truth has power.
- OED. : It has, with all but you: helpless is truth with you: for you are blind, in eye, in ear, in mind.
- TIR. : You are the impotent one: you utter slanders which every man here will apply to you.
- OED. : You have your being only in the night; you couldn't hurt me or any man who sees the sun.
- TIR. : No. Your doom is not to fall by me. Apollo suffices for that, he will bring it about.
- OED. : Are these inventions yours, or Creon's?
- TIR. : Your wretchedness is not Creon's, it is yours.
- OED. : O wealth, and power, and skill — which skill, in emulous life, brings low — what envy eyes you! If for this kingly power which the City gave into my hands, unsought — if for *this* the faithful Creon, my friend from the first, has stalked me in secret, yearning to supplant me! if he has bribed this juggling wizard, this deceitful beggar, who discerns his profit only, blind in his own art!

Tell me now, tell me where you have proved a true diviner? Why, when the song-singing Sphinx was near, did you not speak deliverance to the people? Her riddles were not for any comer to solve, but for

the Mantic Art, and you were apparently instructed neither by birds nor by any sign from the gods. Yet when I came, I, Oedipus, all innocent, I stopped her song. No birds taught me, by my own wit I found the answer. And it is I whom you wish to banish, thinking that you will then stand close to Creon's throne.

You and your ally will weep, I think, for this attempt; and in fact, if you didn't seem to be an old man, you would already have learned, in pain, of your presumption.

In this part the beliefs, the visions, and hence the purposes of the antagonists are directly contrasted. Because both identify themselves so completely with their visions and purposes, the fight descends from the level of dialectic to a level below the rational altogether: it becomes cruelly *ad hominem*. We are made to see the absurd incommensurability of the very *beings* of Oedipus and Tiresias; they shrink from one another as from the uncanny. At the end of the round, it is Oedipus who has received the deeper wound; and his great speech, "O wealth and power," is a far more lyric utterance than the ordered exposition with which he began.

The end of this part of the fight is marked by the intervention of the chorus, which endeavors to recall the antagonists to the most general version of purpose which they supposedly share: the discovery of the truth and the service of the gods:

CHORUS: To us it appears that this man's words were uttered in anger, and yours too, Oedipus. No need for that: consider how best to discharge the mandate of the god.

The last part of the struggle shows Tiresias presenting his whole vision, and Oedipus, on the defensive, shaken to his depths:

TIR. : Although you rule, we have equally the right to reply; in that I too have power. Indeed, I live to serve, not you, but Apollo; and I shall not be enrolled under Creon, either. Therefore I say, since you have insulted even my blindness, that though you have eyesight, you do not see what misery you are in, nor where you are living, nor with whom. Do you know whence you came? No, nor that you are the enemy of your own family, the living and the dead. The double prayer of mother and father shall from this land hound you in horror — who now see clearly, but then in darkness.

Where then will your cry be bounded? What part of Kitharon not echo it quickly back, when you shall come to understand that marriage, to which you sailed on so fair a wind, homelessly home? And many other evils which you do not see will bring you to yourself at last, your children's equal.

Scorn Creon, therefore, and my words: you will be struck down more terribly than any mortal.

OED. : Can I really hear such things from him? Are you not gone? To death? To punishment? Not fled from this house?

TIR. : I should never have come if you hadn't called me.

OED. : I didn't know how mad you would sound, or it would have been a long time before I asked you here to my house.

TIR. : This is what I am: foolish, as it seems to you; but wise, to the parents who gave you birth.

OED. : To whom? Wait: *who* gave me birth?

TIR. : This day shall give you birth, and death.

OED. : In what dark riddles you always speak.

TIR. : Aren't you the best diviner of riddles?

OED. : Very well: mock that gift, which you will find is mine.

TIR. : That very gift was your undoing.

OED. : But if I saved the City, what does it matter?

TIR. : So be it. I am going. Come, boy, lead me.

OED. : Take him away. Your presence impedes and trips me; once you are gone, you can do no harm.

TIR. : I shall go when I have done my errand without fear of your frowns, for they can't hurt me. I tell you, then, that the man whom you have long been seeking with threats and proclamations, Laius' slayer, is here. He is thought to be an alien, but will appear a native Theban, and this circumstance will not please him. Blind, who once could see; destitute, who once was rich, leaning on a staff, he will make his way through a strange land. He will be revealed as brother and father of his own children; of the woman who bore him, both son and husband; sharer of his father's bed; his father's killer.

Go in and ponder this. If you find me wrong, say then that I do not understand the prophetic vision.

Oedipus rushes offstage, his clear purpose gone, his being shaken with fear and anger. Tiresias departs, led by his boy. The chorus is left to move and chant, suffering the mixed and ambivalent feelings, the suggestive but mysterious images, which the Passion in which the agon eventuated produces in them:

Strophe I : Who is it that the god's voice from the Rock of Delphi
says

Accomplished the unspeakable with murderous hands?
Time now that windswift
Stronger than horses
His feet take flight.
In panoply of fire and lightning
Now springs upon him the son of Zeus
Whom the dread follow,
The Fates unappeasable.

Anti-

strophe I : New word, like light, from snowy Parnassus:
Over all the earth trail the unseen one.
For in rough wood,
In cave or rocks,
Like bull bereft — stampeded, futile
He goes, seeking with futile foot to
Flee the ultimate
Doom, which ever
Lives and flies over him.

Strophe II : In awe now, and soul's disorder, I neither accept
The augur's wisdom, nor deny: I know not what to say.
I hover in hope, see neither present nor future.
Between the House of Laius
And Oedipus, I do not hear, have never heard, of any
feud:
I cannot confirm the public charge against him, to help
Avenge the dark murder.

Anti-

strophe II : Zeus and Apollo are wise, and all that is mortal
They know: but whether that human seer knows more
than I
There is no way of telling surely, though in wisdom
A man may excel.
Ah, never could I, till I see that word confirmed, con-
sent to blame him!
Before all eyes the winged songstress, once, assailed
him;
Wise showed he in that test, and to the City, tender:
in my heart
I will call him evil never.

The chorus is considered in more detail below. At this point I merely wish to point out that Oedipus and Tiresias show, in their agon, the "Purpose" part of the Tragic Rhythm; that this turns to "passion", and that the chorus presents the Passion and also the new

Perception which follows. This new perception is of Oedipus as the *possible* culprit. But his outlines are vague; perhaps the vision itself is illusory, a bad dream. The chorus has not yet reached the end of its quest; that will come only when Oedipus in the flesh before them is unmistakably seen as the guilty one. We have reached merely a provisional resting-place, the end of the first figure in which the Tragic Rhythm is presented. But this figure is a reduced version of the shape of the play as a whole, and the fleeting and unwelcome image of Oedipus as guilty corresponds to the final perception or epiphany, the full-stop, with which the play ends.

Oedipus: Ritual and Play

The Cambridge School of Classical Anthropologists has shown in great detail that the form of Greek Tragedy follows the form of a very ancient ritual, that of the *Enniautos-Daimon*, or seasonal god.* This is one of the most influential discoveries of the last few generations, and it gives us new insights into *Oedipus* which I think are not yet completely explored. The clue to Sophocles' dramatizing of the myth of Oedipus is to be found in this ancient ritual, which had a similar form and meaning—that is, it also moved in the “Tragic Rhythm.”

Experts in classical anthropology, like experts in other fields, dispute innumerable questions of fact and of interpretation which the layman can only pass over in respectful silence. One of the thornier questions seems to be whether myth or ritual came first. Is the ancient ceremony merely an enactment of the Ur-Myth of the year-god—Attis, or Adonis, or Osiris, or the “Fisher-King”—in any case that Hero-King-Father-High-Priest who fights with his rival, is slain and dismembered, then rises anew with the Spring season? Or did the innumerable myths of this kind arise to “explain” a ritual which was perhaps mimed or danced or sung to celebrate the annual change of season?

For the purpose of understanding the form and meaning of *Oedipus*, it is not necessary to worry about the answer to this question of historic fact. The figure of Oedipus himself fulfills all the requirements of the scapegoat, the dismembered king or god-figure. The

* See especially Jane Ellen Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, and her *Themis* which contains an “Excursus on the ritual forms preserved in Greek Tragedy” by Professor Gilbert Murray.

situation in which Thebes is presented at the beginning of the play—in peril of its life; its crops, its herds, its women mysteriously infertile, signs of a mortal disease of the City, and the disfavor of the gods — is like the withering which winter brings, and calls in the same way for struggle, dismemberment, death and renewal. And this tragic sequence is the substance of the play. It is enough to know that myth and ritual are close together in their genesis, two direct imitations of the perennial experience of the race.

But when one considers *Oedipus* as a ritual one understands it in ways which one cannot when one considers it merely as a dramatization of a story — even that story. Harrison has shown that the Festival of Dionysos, based ultimately upon the yearly vegetation ceremonies, included *rites de passage* like that celebrating the assumption of adulthood — celebrations of the mystery of *individual* growth and development. At the same time, it was a prayer for the welfare of the whole City; and this welfare was understood not only as material prosperity, but also as the natural order of the family, the ancestors, the present members, and the generations still to come, and, by the same token, as obedience to the gods who were jealous, each in his own province, of this natural and divinely sanctioned order and proportion.

We must suppose that Sophocles' audience (the whole population of the City) came early, prepared to spend the day in the bleachers. At their feet was the semicircular dancing-ground for the chorus, and the thrones for the priests, and the altar. Behind that was the raised platform for the principal actors, backed by the all-purpose, emblematic facade, which would presently be taken to represent Oedipus' Palace in Thebes. The actors were not professionals in our sense, but citizens selected for a religious office, and Sophocles himself had trained them and the chorus.

This crowd must have had as much appetite for thrills and diversion as the crowds who assemble in our day for football games and musical comedies, and Sophocles certainly holds the attention with an exciting show. At the same time his audience must have been alert for the fine points of poetry and dramaturgy, for *Oedipus* is being offered in competition with other plays on the same bill. But the element which distinguishes this theatre, giving it its unique directness and depth, is the *ritual expectancy* which Sophocles assumed in his audience. The nearest thing we have to this ritual sense of theatre is, I suppose, to be found at an Easter performance of the *Matthias Passion*. However that may be, Sophocles' audience must have been

prepared to consider the playing, the make-believe it was about to see — the choral invocations, with dancing and chanting; the reasoned discourses and the terrible combats of the protagonists; the mourning, the rejoicing, and the contemplation of the final stage-picture or epiphany, — as imitating and celebrating the *mystery* of human nature and destiny. And this mystery was at once that of individual growth and development, and that of the precarious life of the human City.

I have indicated how Sophocles presents the life of the mythic Oedipus in the Tragic Rhythm, the mysterious quest of life. Oedipus is shown seeking his own true being; but at the same time and by the same token, the welfare of the City. When one considers the ritual form of the whole play, it becomes evident that it presents the tragic quest of the whole City for *its* well-being; and that, in this larger action, Oedipus is only the Protagonist, the first and most important champion. This tragic quest is realized by all the characters in their various ways; but in the development of the action as a whole it is the chorus alone that plays a part as important as that of Oedipus — its counterpart, in fact. The chorus holds the balance between Oedipus and his antagonists; marks the progress of their struggles, and restates the main theme, and its new variation, after each agon. The ancient ritual was probably performed by a chorus alone without individual developments and variations, and the chorus in *Oedipus* is still the element that throws most light on the ritual form of the play as a whole.

The chorus consists of twelve or fifteen "Elders of Thebes." This group is not intended to be all of the citizens either of Thebes or of Athens. The play opens with a large delegation of Theban citizens before Oedipus' palace, and the chorus proper does not enter until after the prologue. Nor does the chorus speak directly for the Athenian audience; we are asked throughout to make-believe that the Theatre is the agora of Thebes. It would, I think, be more accurate to say that the chorus *represents* the point of view and the interests of Thebes as a whole, and, by analogy, of the Athenian audience. Their errand before Oedipus' palace is like that of Sophocles' audience in the theatre: they are watching a sacred combat, in the issue of which they have an all-important stake. Thus they represent the audience and the citizens in a particular way — not as a mob formed in response to some momentary feeling, but rather as a highly self-conscious community: something closer to the "conscience of the race" than to the over-heated affectivity of a mob.

According to Aristotle, a Sophoclean chorus is a character that takes an important role in the action of the play, instead of merely making incidental music between the scenes, as in the plays of Euripides. The chorus may be described as a group personality, like an old Parliament. It has its own traditions, habits of thought and feeling, and mode of being. It exists, in a sense, as a living entity; but not with the sharp actuality of an individual. It perceives; but its perception is at once wider and vaguer than that of a single man. It shares, in its way, the seeking action of the play as a whole; but it cannot act in all the modes: it depends upon the chief agonists to invent and try out the detail of policy, just as a rather helpless but critical Parliament depends upon the Prime Minister to act, but in its less specific form of life survives his destruction.

When the chorus enters after the prologue, with its questions, its invocation of the various gods, and its focus upon the hidden and jeopardized welfare of the City — Athens or Thebes — the list of essential *dramatis personae*, as well as the elements needed to celebrate the ritual, are complete, and the main action can begin. It is the function of the chorus to mark the stages of this action, and to perform the *suffering* and *perceiving* part of the Tragic Rhythm. The protagonist and his antagonists develop the "Purpose" with which the tragic sequence begins; the chorus, with its less than individual being, broods over the agons, marks their stages with a word (like that of the chorus leader in the middle of the Tiresias scene), and, with its odes, suffers the results, and the new perception at the end of the fight.

The choral odes are lyrics, but they are not to be understood as the art of words only, for they are intended also to be danced and sung. Though each chorus has its own shape, its beginning, middle and end, it represents also one Passion or Pathos in the changing action of the whole. This Passion, like the other moments in the Tragic Rhythm, is felt at so general, or, rather, so *deep* a level, that it seems to contain both the mob ferocity that Nietzsche felt in it, and, at the other extreme, the patience of prayer. This may be illustrated from the chorus I have quoted at the end of the Tiresias scene.

It begins (close to the savage emotion of the end of the fight) with images suggesting that cruel "Bacchic frenzy" which is supposed to be the common root of Tragedy and of the Old Comedy: "In panoply of fire and lightning/The son of Zeus now springs upon him." In the first antistrophe these images come together more clearly as we relish the chase; and the fleeing culprit, as we imagine him, begins to

resemble Oedipus, who is lame, and always associated with the rough wilderness of Kitharon. But in the second strophe, as though appalled by its ambivalent feelings and the imagined possibilities, the chorus sinks back into a more dark and patient posture of suffering, "in awe," "hovering in hope." In the second antistrophe this is developed into something like the orthodox Christian attitude of prayer, based on faith, and assuming the possibility of a hitherto unimaginable truth and answer: "Zeus and Apollo are wise," etc. The whole chorus then ends with a new vision of Oedipus, of the culprit, and of the direction in which the welfare of the City is to be sought. This vision is still colored by the chorus's human love of Oedipus as Hero, for the chorus has still its own purgation to complete, cannot as yet accept completely either the suffering in store for it, nor Oedipus as Scapegoat. But it marks the end of the first complete "Purpose-Passion-Perception" unit, and lays the basis for the new Purpose which will begin in the next unit.

The chorus represents an element which is always present in the action of the play, the element of Passion in the deepest, but not, as Nietzsche would have it, in the rawest sense. This "Passion" is felt in the agons as the helpless concern for the common good with which the chorus follows the struggle. When the fighters depart, in fear and anger, and the chorus is left to move and chant, to mull over its sensuous and suggestive images, dreams or mantic inspirations — then "Passion" itself takes the stage, and carries the main action. If one endeavors to think of the play as a whole as the "imitation of an action," then the Tragic Rhythm analyzes human action temporarily, into successive moments or modes, as a crystal analyzes a beam of white light spatially into the colored bands of the spectrum. And the various elements in the play, the parts of the plot, the characters, the forms of discourse from ratiocination to the lyric; the dancing and the singing — all actualize more concretely the appropriate moments in the Tragic Rhythm, the temporal "spectrum of action."

Sophocles and Euripides, the Rationalist

Oedipus Rex is a mirror of human life and action which could have been formed only in the Tragic Theatre of the Festival of Dionysos. The perspectives of the myth, of the rituals, and of the traditional *hodos*, the way of life of the City — "habits of thought and feeling" which constitute the traditional wisdom of the race — were all required to make this play possible. That is why we have to try to re-

gain these "perspectives" if we are to understand the written play which has come down to us: the analysis of the play leads to an analysis of the Theatre in which it was formed.

But though the Theatre was there, everyone could not use it to the full: Sophocles was required. This becomes clear if one considers the very different use which Euripides, Sophocles' contemporary, makes of the Tragic Theatre and its ritual forms.

Professor Gilbert Murray has explained in detail how the tragic form is derived from the ritual form; and he has demonstrated the ritual forms which are preserved in each of the extant Greek Tragedies. In general, the ritual had its agon, or sacred combat, between the old King, or god or hero, and the new, corresponding to the agons in the tragedies, and the "Purpose" moment of the Tragic Rhythm. It had its *Sparagmos*, in which the royal victim was literally or symbolically torn asunder, followed by the Lamentation and/or Rejoicing of the chorus; elements which correspond to the moments of "Passion". The ritual had its Messenger, its Recognition Scene, and its Epiphany; various plot devices for representing the moment of "Perception" which follows the Pathos. Professor Murray, in a word, studies the art of tragedy in the light of ritual forms, and thus, throws a really new light upon Aristotle's *Poetics*. The parts of the ritual would appear to correspond to the "Organic Parts of the Plot," which Aristotle mentions, but, in the text which has come down to us, fails to expound completely. In this view, both the ritual and the more highly elaborated and individualized art of tragedy would be "imitating" action in the Tragic Rhythm; the parts of the ritual, and the Organic Parts of the Plot, would both be devices for showing forth the three moments of this rhythm.*

Professor Murray, however, does not make precisely these deductions. Unlike Aristotle, he takes the plays of Euripides, rather than Sophocles' *Oedipus*, as the patterns of the Tragic Form. That is because his attitude to the ritual forms is like Euripides' own: he responds to their purely theatrical effectiveness, but has no interest or belief in the prerational image of human nature and destiny which the ritual conveyed; which Sophocles felt as still alive and significant for his generation, and presented once more in *Oedipus*. Professor Murray shows that Euripides restored the *literal* ritual much more accurately than Sophocles — his epiphanies, for example, are usually the bodily showing-forth of a very human god, who cynically expounds his cruel

* This question is discussed in "Notes on Aristotle's *Poetics*," Part III.

part in the proceedings; while the "epiphany" in *Oedipus*, the final tableau of the blind old man with his incestuous brood, merely conveys the moral truth which underlay the action, and implies the anagoge; human dependence upon a mysterious and divine order of nature. Perhaps these distinctions may be summarized as follows: Professor Murray is interested in the ritual forms in abstraction from all content; Sophocles saw also the meaning or spiritual content of the old forms: understood them at a level deeper than the literal, as imitations of an action still "true" to life in his sophisticated age.

Though Euripides and Sophocles wrote at the same time and for the same Theatre, one cannot understand either the form or the meaning of Euripides' plays on the basis of Sophocles' dramaturgy. The beautiful lyrics sung by Euripides' choruses are, as I have said, incidental music rather than organic parts of the action; they are not based upon the feeling that all have a stake in the common way of life and therefore in the issue of the present action. Euripides' individualistic heroes find no light in their suffering, and bring no renewal to the moral life of the community: they are at war with the very clear, human and malicious gods, and what they suffer, they suffer unjustly and to no good end. Where Sophocles' celebrated irony seems to envisage the *condition humaine* itself — the plight of the psyche in a world which is ultimately mysterious to it — Euripides' ironies are all aimed at the incredible "gods" and at the superstitions of those who believe in them. In short, if these two writers both used the Tragic Theatre, they did so in very different ways.

Verral's *Euripides the Rationalist* shows very clearly what the basis of Euripides' dramaturgy is. His use of myth and ritual is like that which Cocteau, or still more exactly Sartre, makes of them — for parody or satirical exposition, but without any belief in their meaning. If Euripides presents the plight of Electra in realistic detail, it is because he wants us to feel the suffering of the individual without benefit of any objective moral or cosmic order — with an almost sensational immediacy: he does not think that the myth is significant *as such*. If he brings Apollo in the flesh before us, it is not because he "believes" in Apollo, but because he disbelieves in him, and wishes to reveal this figment of the Greek imagination as literally incredible. He depends as much as Sophocles upon the common heritage of ritual and myth: but he "reduces" its form and images to the uses of parody and metaphorical illustration, in the manner of Ovid and of the French Neo-classic Tradition. And the human action he reveals is the extremely modern one of the psyche caught in the categories its reason invents,

responding with unmitigated sharpness to the feeling of the moment, but cut off from the deepest level of experience, where the mysterious world is yet felt as real, and prior to our inventions, demands and criticisms.

Though Sophocles was not using the myths and ritual forms of the Tragic Theatre for parody and to satirize their tradition, it does not appear that he had any more naive belief in their literal validity than Euripides did. He would not, for his purposes, have had to ask himself whether the myth of Oedipus conveyed any historic facts. He would not have had to believe that the performance of Oedipus, or even the Festival of Dionysos itself, would assure the Athenians a good crop of children and olives. On the contrary he must have felt that the Tragic Rhythm of action which he discerned in the myth, which he felt as underlying the forms of the ritual, and which he realized in so many ways in his play, was a deeper version of human life than any particular manifestation of it, or any conceptual understanding of it, whether scientific and rationalistic, or theological; yet potentially including them all. If one takes Mr. Troy's suggestion, one might say, using the Medieval notion of fourfold symbolism, that Sophocles might well have taken Myth and Ritual as literally "fictions," yet still have accepted their deeper meanings — Trope, Allegory, and Anagoge — as valid.

Oedipus: The Imitation of an Action

The general notion we used to compare the forms and spiritual content of Tragedy and of Ancient Ritual was that of the "imitation of action." That is, ritual imitates action in one way, Tragedy in another; and Sophocles' use of ritual forms indicates that he sensed the Tragic Rhythm common to both.

But the language, plot, and characters of the play may also be understood in more detail and in relation to each other as imitations, in their various media, of the one action. The Unity of Action, Coleridge said, "is not properly a rule, but in itself the great end, not only of the drama, but of the epic, lyric, even to the candle-flame cone of an epigram — not only of poetry, but of poesy in general, as the proper generic term inclusive of all the fine arts, as its species."* Probably the influence of Coleridge partly accounts for the revival of this notion of action, which underlies so many recent studies of poetry, like those of Empson, Burke, Troy, Blackmur, and others who are

* In his essay on *Othello*.

discussed below. Mr. Blackmur's *Language as Gesture* puts it clearly, and so does Mr. Burke's phrase, "language as symbolic action." In *Four Tropes*, Mr. Burke has this to say: "The poet spontaneously knows that 'beauty *is* as beauty *does*' (that the 'state' must be embodied in an 'actualization')."

The concept of "action" is of course ultimately Aristotelian; and the thesis of this essay rests upon a certain interpretation of the doctrine of *Poetics*. A discussion of this doctrine in general will be found below in "Notes on Aristotle's *Poetics*." Here I propose simply to apply it to *Oedipus*.

The difficulty is to make clear the meaning of the word "action." Since "action" is, like "God," not a univocal but an analogical concept, it is easier to say what it does *not* mean than to fix its meaning in any abstract definition whatever. Thus it does *not* mean outward deeds or physical movement, or a series of incidents such as is often said to constitute the "action" of a play: these are rather the effects of action than action itself. In the attempt to define it, one is driven to metaphor: "the focus, or direction of movement, of the psyche, whereby it realizes its being, or actualizes itself, at any moment." — But I hope the notion will become a little clearer in what follows.

Oedipus is the imitation of one action: that ambiguous and ambivalent quest, which we have seen is essentially *both* individual and social. This is the spiritual content of the play: Sophocles' inspiration, the object he seeks to imitate. He must have apprehended it *through* the events and characters of the myth of Oedipus, *through* the forms and rhythms of the ritual; and also, no doubt, through the detail of his own experience. — "come per verdi fronde in pianta vita," — [as one apprehends] through the green leaves, the life in a plant.

One may then imagine him, schematically, as "realizing" this vision or sense of action in the play by a succession of acts of imitation, from the plot down to the last phrase or word. This scheme, of course, has nothing to do with the temporal order which the poet may really have followed in elaborating his composition, nor to the order we follow in becoming acquainted with it. It refers to the "hierarchy of actualizations" which we may learn to see in the completed work.

The first act of imitation consists in making the *plot*, or arrangement of incidents. Aristotle says that the tragic poet is primarily a maker of plots, and that the plot is "the soul of tragedy": i.e., its first actualization. We have seen how the plot "actualizes" both the myth and the Tragic Rhythm of the ritual. From one point of view (that of the demands of reason) the plot makes the story of the myth in-

telligible. From another point of view, the plot shows the *life* in the myth: i.e., the incidents are so arranged as to reveal their seeking action. And so for the ritual: you may say (with Professor Murray) that Sophocles' plot preserves the ritual forms, and let it go at that; or you may say the ritual forms gave him the clue to the arrangement of his incidents, because he saw what they actualized, in ritual form, the same tragic action he was seeking to actualize in his play.

There is no doubt that *Oedipus* is, up to a certain point, rationally coherent. But the play is not essentially or primarily a work of the discursive reason, but of the histrionic sensibility. And the elements of its composition are not primarily ideas but actions. That is why it seems to me that the definition of the plot of *Oedipus* as its "soul" tells us more than the definition of it as the "arrangement of incidents" — which, in our usage, implies the aim of appealing first of all to the mind. Sophocles appeals to the histrionic sensibility; his making of the plot "imitates" the action and is thus the "first actualization" of the quest.

The Characters, or agents, are the second actualization of the action. According to Aristotle, "the agents are imitated mainly with a view to the action" — i.e., the soul of the tragedy is there already in the order of events, the Tragic Rhythm of the life of *Oedipus* and Thebes; but this action may be more sharply realized and more elaborately shown forth by developing individual variations upon it. It was with this principle in mind that Ibsen wrote to his publisher, after two years' work on *The Wild Duck*, that the play was nearly complete, and he could now proceed to "the more energetic individuation of the characters".

If one considers the *Oedipus-Tiresias* scene which I have quoted, one can see how the characters serve to realize the action of the whole. They reveal, at any moment, a "spectrum of action" like that which the Tragic Rhythm spread before us in temporal succession. At the same time, they offer concrete instances of almost photographic sharpness. Thus *Tiresias* "suffers" in the darkness of his blindness while *Oedipus* pursues his reasoned "purpose"; and then *Tiresias* effectuates his "purpose" of serving his mantic vision of the truth, while *Oedipus* "suffers" a blinding passion of fear and anger. The agents also serve to move the action ahead, develop it in time, through their conflicts. The chorus meanwhile, (in some respects *between*, in others *deeper* than the antagonists) represents the interests of that resolution, that final chord of feeling, in which the end of the action seen ironically and sympathetically as one, will be realized.

The third actualization is in the words of the play. Sophocles imitates the seeking action in the reasoned expositions of the characters; in the disputes of the antagonists, and in the lyrics of the chorus. The seeking action which is the substance of the play is imitated first in the plot, second in the characters, and third in the words, concepts and forms of discourse wherein the characters "actualize" their psychic life in its shifting forms, in its response to the even-changing situations of the play. If one thinks of plotting, characterization, and poetry as successive "acts of imitation" by the author, one may also say that they constitute, in the completed work, a hierarchy of forms; and that the words of the play are its "highest individuation". They are the "green leaves" which we actually perceive; the product and the sign of the one "life of the plant" which by an imaginative effort one may divine behind them all.

At this point one encounters again Mr. Burke's theory of "language as symbolic action", and the many contemporary studies of the arts of poetry which have been made from this point of view. It would be appropriate to offer a detailed study of Sophocles' language, using the modern tools of analysis, to substantiate my main point. But this would require the kind of knowledge of Greek which a Jebb spends his life to acquire; and I must be content to try to show, in very general terms, that the peculiar qualities of the poetry of *Oedipus* can only be understood on a histrionic basis.

In the *Oedipus-Tiresias* scene, there is a "spectrum of the forms of discourse" corresponding to the "spectrum of action" which I have described. It extends from *Oedipus*' opening speech — a reasoned exposition, not, of course, without feeling, but based essentially upon clear ideas and a logical order — to the choral chant, based upon sensuous imagery and the "logic of feeling." Thus it employs the principle of composition which Mr. Burke calls "syllogistic progression," and, at the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Burke's "progression by association and contrast." When the Neoclassic and Rationalistic critics of the Seventeenth Century read *Oedipus*, they saw only the order of reason; they did not know what to make of the chorus. Hence Racine's drama of "Action as Rational"; a drama of static situations, of clear concepts and merely illustrative images. Nietzsche, on the other hand, saw only the Passion of the Chorus; for his insight was based on *Tristan*, which is composed essentially in sensuous images, and moves by association and contrast according to the logic of feeling: the drama which takes "Action as Passion." Neither point of view enables one to see how the scene, as a whole, hangs together.

If the speeches of the characters and the songs of the chorus are only the foliage of the plant, this is as much to say that the life and meaning of the whole is never literally and completely present in any one formulation. It takes *all* of the elements—the shifting situation, the changing and developing characters, and their reasoned or lyric utterances—to indicate, in the round, the action Sophocles wishes to convey. Because this action takes the form of reason as well as passion, and of contemplation by way of symbol; because it is essentially “moving” (in the Tragic Rhythm), and because it is shared in different ways by all the characters, the play has neither *literal* unity, nor the rational unity of the truly abstract idea, or “univocal concept.” Its parts and its moments are one only “by analogy”; and just as the Saints warn us that we must believe in order to understand, so we must “make believe,” by a sympathetic and imitative act of the histrionic sensibility, in order to get what Sophocles intended by his play.

It is the histrionic basis of Sophocles’ art which makes it mysterious to us, with our demands for conceptual clarity, or for the luxury of yielding to a stream of feeling and subjective imagery. But it is this also which makes it so crucial an instance of the art of the theatre in its completeness, as though the author understood “song, spectacle, thought and diction” in their primitive and subtle roots. And it is the histrionic basis of drama which “undercuts theology and science.”

Analogue of the "Tragic Rhythm"

In the present study I propose to use *Oedipus* as a landmark, and to relate subsequent forms of drama to it. For it presents an image, at the nascent moment of highest valency, of a way of life and action which is still at the root of our culture.

Professor Buchanan remarks, in *Poetry and Mathematics*, that the deepest and most elaborate development of the Tragic Rhythm is to be found in the *Divine Comedy*. The *Purgatorio* especially, though an epic and not a drama, evidently moves in the Tragic Rhythm, both as a whole and in detail. The daylight climb up the mountain, by moral effort, and in the light of Natural Reason, corresponds to the first moment, that of “Purpose.” The night, under the sign of Faith, Hope and Charity, when the Pilgrim can do nothing by his own unaided efforts, corresponds to the moments of Passion and Perception. The Pilgrim, as he pauses, mulls over the thoughts and experiences of the day; he sleeps and dreams, seeing ambivalent images from the mythic dreaming of the race, which refer also both to his

own "suppressed desires" and to his own deepest aspirations. These images gradually solidify and clarify, giving place to a new perception of his situation. This rhythm, — from day to night to day — repeated in varied forms, carries the Pilgrim from the superficial but whole-hearted motivations of childhood, in the Antipurgatorio, through the divided counsels of the "growing soul," to the new innocence, freedom and integrity of the Terrestrial Paradise — the realm of *The Tempest* or of *Oedipus at Colonus*. The same rhythmic conception governs also the detail of the work, down to the *terza rima*, itself — that verse-form which is clear at any moment in its literal fiction, yet essentially moving ahead and pointing to deeper meanings.

Because Dante keeps his eye always upon the tragic moving of the psyche itself, his vision, like Sophocles', is not limited by any of the forms of thought whereby we seek to fix our experience — in which we are idolatrously expiring, like the coral animal in its shell. But Professor Buchanan shows that the *abstract shape* of the Tragic Rhythm is to be recognized in other and more limited or specialized cultural forms as well. "This pattern," he writes, "is the Greek view of life. It is the method of their and our science, history and philosophy. . . . The Greek employment of it had been humanistic in the main . . . The late Middle Ages and the Renaissance substituted natural objects for the heroes of vicarious tragedies, the experiments in the laboratory. They put such objects under controlled conditions, introduced artificial complications, and waited for the answering pronouncement of fate. The crucial experiment is the crisis of an attempt to rationalize experience, that is, to force it into our analogies. Purgation and recognition are now called elimination of false hypotheses and verification. The shift is significant, but the essential tragic pattern of tragedy is still there."

The Tragic Rhythm is, in a sense, the shape of Racinian Tragedy, even though Racine was imitating action as essentially Rational, and would have called the moments of the rhythm Exposition, Complication, Crisis and dénouement, to satisfy the reason. It is in a way the shape of *Tristan*, though action in that play is "reduced" to Passion, the principles of composition to the logic feeling. Even the over-all shape of *Hamlet* is similar, though the sense of Pathos predominates, and the whole is elaborated in subtle profusion as can only be explained with reference to Dante and the Middle Ages.

At the center stands *Oedipus*: "The" crucial instance of the art of drama, and the basis of the analogies which I propose to draw between the forms of drama which appeared later in our tradition.

W. S. GRAHAM

Men Sign the Sea

Men sign the sea.

One warbreath more sucked round the roaring veins
Keeping the heart in ark then down loud mountains
After his cry.

This that the sea

Moves through moves over sea-tongued the whole waters
Woven over their breath. So shall the floating fires
Blow down on any.

This deep time, scaling broadside the cannoning sea,
Tilting, cast rigged among galloping iron vesselwork,
Snapped wirerope, spitting oil, steam screamed out jets,
Bomb drunkard hero herded by the hammerheaded elements,
The filling limpet shell's slow gyre round the drowned,
Loud rafted foamfloored house to wave a scorched hand
Back under the skyracked early garden of errors.
The cairns of foam stand up. The signed sea flowers.

The lovesigned sea

Weeded with words and branched with human ores
Lights up. An arm waves off the land. Thunderous
Time mines the sea.

Men sign the sea

Maintained on error, bright emerald over the drowned.
This that the sea moves through drives through the land
Twin to their cry.

NEIL WEISS:

Song for Blackbirds

You blackbird, blackbird there;
you, who sit, you and hurl
wings after the city, you, yes.

Blackbird's wings deep seas raise
and light light lashed coffins,
me between, caw-caw-caw black

bird, a skate, a swing, a drift,
always my doom, you so vicious
black, let me be wings for once.

Churl, wait; it comes black for
black, the broken column, yes
terday's poem, windy thistles

graving the empty air, as you
black-black too circle square —
how snap-black you are! Sheen

of my heart, like you too, caw
ing from black and spleen where
we have been. The touch, last

night's bliss for a corpse black
er than doom, sweet as lilies
fed by flesh, where you sing

over flowers, not to kneel, no!
Bless the day he died, planted,
an end, so much plot and plaster.

Hurry birds better black, high.
Fly high too much black; go to
always light. Eh, you black, black

JOSEPH WHITT:

Inside the Arch of Bone

Inside the arch of bone are endless streets:
 grey empty flats where houses peer
 with scalloped eyes at those who fear
 to tremble in a fractured crowd.

Won't someone merely walk across to break
 to fragmentize the shadowy precise
 or force these houses whisper-scream
 with clack of heel on silent ice.

I wait — impatience long has patience found:
 a naked foot now soothes the bedroom floor
 upping nerves on tiptoe greet the sound
 till frigid hush can't stand the pain.

The footsteps shuffle, turn, and then retreat
 to wander up another street.

DAVID J. PEACKER:

Spain

Warped forests, struck by decay
 Where God leered, and two taut Dragoons
 of the steel-suckled lance, flushed and putrid
 Marched through the pristine vines
 on to the banks of the unlit bog,
 and nails searching their gangrened goblets
 Plundered, their bones, for one iast time, —
 Thus, God, pure and vastly sombre,
 knotted their hair, teethed them with wire
 hooked them on foaming mares, towards the mist,
 where plucked a red guitar.

KLAUS MANN:

Dream-America

"You are going to America?" a French poet once asked a friend. "You'll see New York? It's like visiting a fortune teller . . ." What he meant to say is that the super-city on the Hudson anticipates the style and rhythm, the horrors and splendors of a world to come.

Was that poet — Jean Cocteau of Paris — not curious to take a look at the future himself? Or was he afraid, perhaps, the face of the future might prove as terrifying as that of the wild-haired Gorgon whose stony eyes turn the beholder to stone? Also, it could be that, in Cocteau's opinion, it does not become a poet to be too interested in reality; instead of exploring a material world which has little to offer to him, he ought to concentrate on the realm of his dreams and visions, his own inalienable domain.

But whatever his reasons and considerations may have been, Poet Cocteau seemed reluctant to venture on a trans-Atlantic trip. When he came to New York at last, in 1936, it was just for a couple of days or so — a flying visit which took place under rather peculiar conditions. One can hardly say that he tainted his imagination by too close a contact with the reality of American life. In fact, the New York Cocteau saw and described is as much of a fantasy as the imaginary Mississippi River, depicted, about a century before, by the French romanticist and royalist, Chateaubriand.

Cocteau — not less romantic, in his own way, than Chateaubriand — made his first extensive journey in disguise, impersonating Mr. Phineas Fogg, hero of Jules Verne's utopian novel, *Round the World in Eighty Days*. The book had enthralled Jean as a young boy; now he wanted actually to realize Verne's dream, following in every detail the pattern of Mr. Fogg, keeping the same schedule and visiting all the places where his model had been. The odd enterprise was arranged and financed by the popular newspaper, *Paris Soir*, M. Cocteau traveling as its special correspondent.

Charles Baudelaire has suggested that we should regard the man of genius as an *homme-enfant* — "a man possessing at every moment of the day the genius of childhood, a man, that is, for whom familiarity has robbed of its brilliance no single aspect of our common life."

Utterly impressionable, constantly in raptures, our childlike traveller took hasty, enchanting glimpses of Egypt and China, Japan and Honolulu. From San Francisco, he rushed on to Hollywood, where he saw nobody but King Vidor and Mr. and Mrs. Chaplin, and then intensely enjoyed the sensation of a night flight from Los Angeles to New York.

The big city, seen from his window at the Ambassador Hotel, brought to his mind Venice with its Grand Canal bordered by palaces. "The rare cars of a Sunday morning glided by like gondolas . . ."

It is a curious experience to follow this *homme-enfant* through the familiar streets of Manhattan. Seen through his eyes, the city reveals unexpected secrets, surprises us with new vistas. The skyscrapers lose their bulk and become transparent like bewitched castles in fairy-tales. They are crisp and flimsy as tulle curtains; brisk airs traverse them and play around the towering facades . . . The poet told local reporters that New York was "a city of tulle," and its air free of "moral dust." They garbled his remark, translating it as follows: N. Y. WEARS WOMAN'S DRESS, JEAN COCTEAU SAYS. He enjoyed a hurried visit to Radio City and was fascinated by Times Square, particularly marvelous at dusk: "Its shops sell inspired rubbish, the automatic bars are gorged with treasures of Cathay, milk fountains, beer fountains, malt fountains, and ice-cream fountains gush from marble walls, while, high above, the sky-signs vie in aerial fantasy . . ."

At Coney Island, he recognized with horror and delight a nightmarish fun-fair he once had seen in an early motion picture. It seemed actually quite plausible for two young lovers to be swept apart and lose each other in this mad whirl of colors and noises, as it had happened in the ancient movie farce. Fascinated and thrilled, Mr. Fogg plunged into a maelstrom of lightning photographers, carrousels, souvenir-peddlers, freaks, crying children, Russian coursers spinning around garden cafés . . .

But even more enchanting than the great fair are Minsky's Burlesque Shows: *Homme-enfant* is spellbound by the frozen smiles and rank gestures of the strip-tease artists — among them the celebrated Miss Murray whom Mr. Fogg finds particularly admirable as "an exponent of the flamboyant style."

And then, of course, there is Harlem, *le quartier noir* — more attractive, more significant to our poet-reporter than any other district of New York. "I see Harlem as the power-plant of the city," he writes in his travel book, *Mon Premier Voyage*, "and its frolicsome black youth as the coal that feeds the furnaces and keeps the wheels turning.

In the Middle Ages many a population fell victim to St. Vitus' dance; its frenzied rhythms, spreading by contagion, set a whole city capering. And all New York, with its passion for cathedrals, organs, holy candles, gargoyles, minstrels and burlesques, for mystery and mysticism, is convulsed by the black rhythms."

What a bizarre view of New York they received, those hundreds of thousands of readers of the *Paris Soir*! Many of them may have wondered: "It sounds queer, almost incredible . . . But he has seen it, after all: it must be true! So New York is like that: a dream-city with fortresses of tulle; a pseudo-Gothic cathedral with electric fireworks; a staggering merry-go-round — gaudy, savage, dynamic; a colossal pageant dominated by that fabulous personality, Miss Murray, exponent of the flamboyant style; a madhouse resounding with the noise of gigantic trumpets, saxophones and drums . . . Curious: but that's what the paper says . . ."

If Jean Cocteau had stayed in his Paris apartment — that magic cave filled with strange objects and even stranger dreams —, if he had abstained from making the fatiguing journey, his portrait of New York would have been equally inspired and equally absurd.

* * *

Other Continental authors — even more reckless and more imaginative than the roving reporter of the *Paris Soir* — described American sceneries without having ever set foot on American soil. If Frederic Prokosch, in his novel, *The Asiatics*, evoked with remarkable success the hues and perfumes of an Orient he had never seen in reality, certain Europeans conjured up a dream land they chose to christen "America."

Of particular interest in this context are the cases of two German-writing novelists — two authors, by the way, of incommensurable style and stature: one of them is a genius; the other, an unusually cheap and puerile story-teller. As for the former, Franz Kafka, his posthumous fame has assumed impressive proportions and continues to grow: the name of that tragic visionary and superb artist has been adopted as a kind of fetish or battle cry by the intellectual vanguard of five continents. The latter, on the contrary, is completely unknown — and rightly so — outside of the German-speaking world. But while Kafka's work, for all its international prestige, is read only by a small group of high-brows, the other writer in question — his name is Karl May — enjoys enormous popularity with the masses, especially the young.

Karl May, in Germany, is a myth, a national institution. For the past fifty years or so, millions of German boys (including many a so-called "adult"!) have been devouring his adventure stories — Wild-West thrillers of the most trashy, most distasteful sort. One of the most fervent Karl May fans was a certain good-for-nothing from Brunau, Austria, who was destined to play a fairly spectacular, if somewhat irritating, role in world history. Young Schicklgruber adored Karl May, whose works remained his favorite reading even in later years. His own imagination, his whole notion of life was impregnated by these crude and fantastic tales. The false conception of "heroism" presented by Karl May fascinated the future Fuehrer; he loved this primitive but effective shrewdness — the use of "secret weapons" and gruesome tricks, such as carrying prisoners as shields, the brutal cunning of wild animals in the jungle; he was delighted by the glorification of savagery.

The Wild West is still wild and wonderful and very far away — for the boys in Brunau and equally dreary places. The names of Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Rio Grande, Sierra-de-los-Organos, Rianca and Guadalupe, are still charged with romantic attraction. Oh, the endless prairies, the glowing sands of the deserts! Magic nights in the open, under stars that seem to have a more violent, more dynamic lustre than those of European skies! Life in the wigwam is tremendous with danger, and fun. The wicked Ogellallah Indians are forever waiting in ambush for their innocent victims. Everyone is in the habit of spending a large part of his day in ambush — a cozy, if slightly unsafe, place to be. Winnetou, valiant chieftain of the Apaches, is always on the alert. Young braves are proud of their scalp collections, much as European lads are of their stamps or butterflies. The villains are wily and efficient, but definitely less so than Old Shatterhand, who always rushes into the picture, an experienced *deus ex machina*, just in the nick of time —, the ideal blend of Tom Mix and young Siegfried: at once ruthless and chivalrous, well-informed, even erudite, and pleasantly naive, frightening and attractive. He plans and carries out gigantic butcheries, and his hands still dripping with blood, makes instructive speeches about Indian life. A prolific writer, he describes his innumerable adventures with verve and eloquence. On many thousands of pages he cheerfully boasts of his amazing deeds. His vanity is disarming. Over and over he says: "I am great, I am marvellous . . ." — and the boys, from Brunau to Berlin, are only too willing to take his word for it.

Herr Karl May of Radebeul, near Dresden, and that fabulous character, Old Shatterhand, were allegedly the same person. He was admired, not merely as a great narrator, but also, and above all, as a kind of superman — as the hero who had actually faced all the dangers and performed the astounding deeds described in *Winnetou* and other best-selling yarns. There was hardly a reader who dared question the credibility of those breath-taking reports. Even some of the more serious critics considered May's fantastic tales a trustworthy representation of the American scene. A French writer, for instance, makes the following statements in his preface to Karl May's novel, *The Revenge of the Farmer*:

"The traveller (Karl May) assures us that no single point in his story is invention or exaggeration. He has travelled extensively in the United States, and merely describes what he has actually seen. The peculiarities of the New World no longer shock or surprise him: he is accustomed to them . . . American morals, no matter what certain admirers of that young civilization may say, are generally inferior to ours: they sometimes lower themselves to abject savagery, especially when it comes to the ugly practices of personal revenge . . ."

The French observer adds some remarks about the ghastly custom of lynching — severe words which are undeniably justified in themselves, but have little to do with Karl May's queer interpretation of American life —, and finally draws this conclusion: "A kind of mutilated Christianity such as we find in that country, is unable to maintain the divine law of Pardon . . . The thirst for both gold and revenge are the two most terrible passions of the Yankee."

These words were written about 1900 — the time of May's greatest prestige and popularity. Shortly afterwards, the embarrassing truth transpired: "Old Shatterhand" had never been in America at all; all his tales were sheer, brassy invention. What a shock to his many admirers! But poor Herr May's position grew even more precarious when the question arose: Where, then, was he during all those years he supposedly spent over there?

The idol of German boyhood turned out to be an ordinary ex-convict who had served many years in various Saxonian jails. His criminal record was impressive enough, if only on a comparatively modest scale. He had stolen everything from billiard balls and gold watches to baby carriages and horses; had cheated peasants and little shopkeepers by presenting himself as a famous physician or the agent of an insurance company; one of the fanciful pseudonyms he used on

those occasions was, curiously enough, *Dr Heilig* (Dr. Holy). He had been a pathological liar and a vulgar crook with a definite leaning toward delusions of grandeur. His petty crimes, his underhanded little tricks against society, reflect an obvious and rather pitiable inferiority complex. Born the son of a poor weaver, in a village near Chemnitz, Saxony — one of the most unattractive, most prosaic parts of Germany — he had had a miserable youth. He was exceedingly vain and very eager to impress a world which had treated him without kindness. In the beginning, he may have dreamed of becoming a great gangster — feared by the rich, envied and admired by the poor. But the only result of his amateurish attempts in this direction was even greater humiliation. So at last he became disgusted with his own shabby indentiy, his dull and glamourless lot, and decided to transform himself into Old Shatterhand — a dashing, self-assured adventurer lavishly gifted with all those virtues in which the real Karl May was so deplorably lacking. Endowed with this splendid new personality, he escaped from his Saxonian jail to a dream land — a magnificent wilderness alive with staunch-hearted Sioux, untamed mustangs, stamping buffaloes.

There is hardly a single detail in his "American" stories that is not a complete and ludicrous misrepresentation. Atmosphere and landscape, gestures, words and actions are altogether un-American. Un-American are the villains — who, for some mysterious reason, are usually presented as Mormons or Armenians —; un-American, the noble and at the same time slightly sadistic heroes; utterly un-American, above all, is the self-righteous narrator, Old Shatterhand-Karl May. His cold cruelty and complete absence of any sense of humor even make him a decidedly *anti-American* type, and the only thing that he does actually represent is the image of an American adventurer in the mind of a petty criminal in Saxony.

How surprised, indeed, how disappointed Herr May must have been to find the real America so very different from his glowing, distorted vision! For he did visit this country, after all — in 1908, four years before his death. The aging novelist and his wife inspected Niagara Falls, Yellowstone Park, the Grand Canyon, various Indian settlements, and the grave of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Karl May disliked the noisy American cities. The country, he felt, utterly failed in living up to his grand expectations. Where was the wigwam? Where was Winnetou?

Frau Klara May wrote a book, *With Karl May Across America*,

which also includes the story of a second trip to the United States she made after her husband's death. The devoted widow then faithfully followed in what she calls "Karl May's footsteps" — probably referring to the fantastic zigzag as outlined in Old Shatterhand's imaginary reports. In the Denver zoo she took a look at *Leo, the Lion* — "model of the famous trade mark of the Mayer-Goldway films," as Frau Klara puts it. The proud animal was just celebrating its sixteenth birthday, which made the encounter all the more festive and significant. Another climax of the German lady's trip was her meeting with President Herbert Hoover, about whom he has the following to say:

"President Hoover is a man whose personality fails to arouse warm sympathy, even in America. But as I looked at his sharply chiseled features, I was struck by the impression: Here is a man who knows exactly what he wants."

That the German Ambassador introduced May's widow to the White House, seems to indicate that at the time of his death, in 1912, Old Shatterhand had more or less regained his respected position. The revelation of his shady past had caused considerable scandal, years before: a howl of indignation had arisen throughout the German press, from platforms and pulpits the author of *Winnetou* had been denounced as a "corrupter of youth." But German faith in authority is not so easily shaken. And Karl May had established himself as the supreme authority in everything concerning Red-Skins, deserts, prairies, mustangs, scalp-hunters, cannibalism, and the delights of primitive, cruel warfare. Compromised for a short while, the old wizard was again to assert his problematical sway over new generations of German boys.

The Third Reich marked Karl May's ultimate triumph, the ghastly realization of his puerile and immoral dreams. It is according to his ethical and aesthetic standards that the Austrian house-painter, nourished in his youth by Old Shatterhand, attempted to re-build the world. He and his henchmen were desperadoes in the good old Karl May tradition — perverted romanticists, infantile, criminal, irresponsible. Hopelessly estranged from both reality and art, those reckless fantasts and murderous adventurers were ready to sacrifice all civilization and common sense on the altar of "heroism" — the evil, atavistic kind of "heroism" preached and dramatized by their literary master and predecessor, Karl May of Saxony.

Is another German generation to be confused and corrupted by

such poisonous trash? Will American authorities in the occupied Reich continue to tolerate the traditional Karl May cult? Thirty-five years after his death, an irresponsible swindler goes on slandering the United States. The Dream-America he presents is not only a gross falsification but also a vicious insult.

* * *

Franz Kafka, too, tried to escape from imprisonment when embarking on his imaginary trip to the United States. His bondage, however, was not of physical nature. The author of *The Trial* and *The Castle* was a prisoner of his obsessions and hallucinations, his metaphysical anguish, his insight, his fears, his genius. He also was a prisoner of Prague where he spent most of his life — Prague, the ancient capital with its glorious and sinister memories, its complex tradition, its age-old feuds; Prague, the city of narrow streets and magnificent vistas, of violence and nostalgia, of music and alchemy; the city of the Golem — that weird archetype of all robots, Frankenstein's model and predecessor —, the city of Smetana, the city of esoteric sects and literary coteries. Franz Kafka — the German-speaking Jew born in Hapsburg-dominated Bohemia, later a citizen of the young republic of Czecho-Slovakia — belonged to Prague as a monk belongs to his monastery, a madman to his cell, a wingless bird to his cage. Prague was his chain, his curse, his love, his destiny. But once — in 1913, just before the outbreak of World War I — he made a bold and desperate attempt to break jail, to fly to the shores of a freer and happier country.

The novel *Amerika* — a fragment, like Kafka's two other novels, and, like those, published after his death — opens with the following paragraph:

"As Karl Rossman, a poor boy of sixteen who had been packed off to America by his parents because a servant girl had seduced him and got herself a child by him, stood on the liner slowly entering the harbour of New York, a sudden burst of sunshine seemed to illumine the Statue of Liberty, so that he saw it in a new light, although he had sighted it long before. The arm with the sword rose up as if newly stretched aloft, and round the figure blew the free winds of heaven."*

It is a masterly beginning — giving in a few concentrated sentences not only the main facts of the hero's past, but also the atmosphere of the haven he is now approaching. The single phrase, *the free winds of heaven*, characterizes the mood and flavor of the entire story.

* Quoted from the admirable translation by Edwin Muir (New Directions).

For this enterprising lad, Karl Rossman, whom we see arriving in New York, is indeed almost free, almost happy — less tormented at least than his unfortunate brothers, the heroes of Kafka's two other novels. For them, there will be no "free winds," no Statue of Liberty: they must remain in Europe, in Prague, in jail, to endure the merciless decisions of the inscrutable judges.

But even if Karl, in contrast to his doomed relatives at home, managed to run away, and even if the fugitive is free, or comparatively free, of guilt — the problem of guilt *as such*, the mystic curse of the Original Sin follows him over the ocean. The emigrant will be haunted by old moral conflicts and dilemmas, even in his new country, the land of his hopes and dreams, his Dream-America.

During the last hours of his journey, Karl has made friends with the stoker of the boat — a gloomy and obstinate fellow, who for some reason believes that he has been unfairly treated by the officers. He complains bitterly, and there are lengthy examinations of the stoker's case — a sort of solemn but half-grotesque trial in the Captain's state-room. Karl tries his best to convince the officers of the stoker's right, but we somehow feel from the beginning that his cause is hopeless: all the authorities are prejudiced against him. This comical and painful scene reaches its climax with a sudden announcement coming from one of the examiners. The gentleman in question, a certain Senator Jacob, turns out to be Karl's wealthy uncle. "Kiss me!" the Senator demands, while the Captain adds: "This is one of the miracles that can still happen sometimes — especially here in America." — Wealthy Uncle Jacob presently takes young Karl to his sumptuous home. As for the stoker, we leave him to his fate which is presumably dark.

Most details of Kafka's description of the American scene are quite inaccurate — as fantastic, indeed, as the sword in the hand of the Statue of Liberty —; yet the picture as a whole has poetical truth. The balcony of Uncle Jacob's house where young Rossman spends many hours staring at the streets of New York, has more to do with a Parisian studio than with anything American. The country house of a millionaire resembles an ancient European castle — a typical Kafka castle, in fact —, confusing, frightening, with countless corridors and galleries, huge empty rooms, tremendous staircases, an unfinished chapel. At night most of the vast, baroque structure is shrouded in complete darkness as there is no electricity. It is an extraordinary place, and its inhabitants are equally amazing — notably Mr. Pollunder — a rather evil gentleman —, his well-meaning friend, Mr. Green, and an ag-

gressive girl by the name of Clara. Karl naively expresses his surprise: "So you have actually old houses in America too." She sneers at him: "You have some queer ideas about America!" — "You shouldn't laugh at me," he says in vexation, and the author adds, judiciously: "After all, he knew both Europe and America, while she knew only America."

She is hard to cope with, this pugnacious Miss Clara! When young Rossman does not want to kiss her, she loses her temper, strikes him, and throws him on the bed. The European boy notices, not without horror, that she has muscles of steel. "Of course," he comforts himself, "she is much stronger than I am, since she has spent most of her life practicing the feats of a professional wrestler."

There was certainly nothing lascivious about Karl's little row with Clara; yet the young man is severely punished for it. His uncle Jacob sends him, through Mr. Pollunder, a farewell letter, telling him in stern and solemn words that the Senator's house will be closed from now on to the unfaithful nephew, and our young adventurer finds himself friendless and penniless on the highways. The terrifying streets of American cities spread before him, with the Gothic lines of steel-constructed skyscrapers profiled against a pallid and hostile sky, like cathedrals from another planet where people are praying to another God.

The helpless wanderer first intends to go to San Francisco, having been told that there, *in the East* (as Kafka puts it), there may still be a chance to discover gold mines. He changes his plans, however, when he makes the acquaintance of two tramps — Delamarche, a Frenchman, and Robinson, an Irishman. Karl distrusts Robinson because he remembers having read somewhere that one should beware of all Irishmen in America. But the Frenchman turns out to be even more dangerous — a selfish and unscrupulous creature, filthy, cruel, and altogether objectionable.

The two vagabonds want to take him to a big city named Ramses; but it is a long journey and on the way they stop at another large settlement called Butterford. There Karl has the good luck to find a job as elevator boy at the Hotel Occidental, thanks to a benign and influential woman, the Supreme Cook (*Oberköchin*). This kind and powerful personality, however, is by no means the highest authority in the complicated hierarchy of the huge hotel. The Supreme Doorman — a brute who enjoys beating up the elevator boys — and the nasty headwaiter are both, perhaps, more important than she. In any case, the motherly

kitchen-queen seems quite unable to help her protégé when he finds himself in a fix brought about by Robinson, the erratic Irishman, who visits him at the hotel in a state of utter intoxication, presumably with the express purpose of compromising Karl's position.

Jobless again, our young runaway has trouble with the police ("‘And you were dismissed without your jacket?’ asked the policeman. — ‘Why, yes,’ said Karl; so in America too it was the habit of authorities to ask questions about what they could see for themselves."); finally, however he finds a dubious kind of refuge in an apartment occupied by the two crooks, Robinson and Delamarche, and their mistress, a prodigious female by the name of Brunelda. This is the most painful of Karl's ordeals: we see him enslaved, humiliated by the macabre trio. Whatever his past crimes may be (his romance with the servant maid? His fight with Miss Clara of the castle? Or just the Original Sin?), he pays dearly for them. His bondage in Brunelda's sloppy and shady household is more abject, more degrading, than any punishment imposed on him by his parents, back in Prague, could have possibly been. If only there were any other job available! But the information he gets from the young man next door does not sound encouraging. That ambitious youth studies at night, keeping awake with the help of black coffee, while during the day he is "a salesman, a miserable counter-jumper, not much more than an errand-boy, in Montly's big store." When poor Karl asks him: "Perhaps I could get a job in the store too?", the hard-working student laughs at such naiveté. "Why, what do you think?" he says. "It's easier to be appointed district judge here than a door-opener at Montly's."

In the end, however, Rossman does get himself a promising position with a fabulous institution called "The Great Nature Theatre of Oklahoma." It appears to be a kind of gigantic *WPA* project (in 1913!), organized and financed by unknown but extremely powerful benefactors. The unemployed are at first somewhat suspicious and join reluctantly; but Karl has nothing to lose and accepts with enthusiasm. An official inquires as to his former occupation in Europe, and he replies, rather vaguely: "I wanted to become an engineer." The official makes a casual gesture as though to express the remoteness of Europe and the insignificance of all plans and hopes one might have cherished in that other world. Karl obtains a job as a machinist and is very pleased — all the more so as the first meal offered to the new employees turns out to be unexpectedly opulent. This splendid dinner party, preceding the departure to Oklahoma, is the last scene we are

allowed to witness of Karl Rossman's wondrous adventures in America.

Kafka was particularly fond of this concluding chapter; his friends tell us that he used to read it aloud in an "unforgettable manner." With an enigmatic smile he suggested that his young hero, Karl Rossman, might well find again, "in this almost boundless theatre," his profession, his security and freedom, and perhaps even his homeland and parents — "as by a divine spell."

Kafka himself was not in a position to describe these happy developments. The novel had to remain a fragment as did all of his major compositions, according to a mysterious inherent law. The very themes of these works — the eternal problems of Guilt and Atonement, human loneliness and the unfathomable riddle of Supreme Justice — prohibit them from finding an end: they are essentially and necessarily *endless*.

Amerika, however, is the only one of Kafka's stories on the last pages of which an optimistic mood prevails. The youthful hero disappears — running, capering like a reckless foal in the midst of a vast, heroic landscape. His tragic brother and creator, Franz Kafka, watches the agile figure gradually vanishing between the huge hills, trees and buildings — carried away, as it were, by the free winds of heaven, the powerful, tonic breath of Dream-America.

MARGARET WEBSTER:

The Last of Shaw?

ERIC BENTLEY: *Bernard Shaw*. New Directions.

Mr. Shaw has scored another victory. He has conquered Mr. Bentley. This is no trivial feat; for Mr. Bentley is the first critic to undertake a serious study of Shaw who does not belong to the generations that were immediately affected by Shaw's major work as it came fire-new from the furnace; he is not one of those old fossils of forty and upwards who were roused to furious indignation or belligerent enthusiasm as G.B.S. poured out the great torrent of his creative iconoclasm for the first time. It is a little startling to find that Mr. Bentley invariably uses the past tense in referring to his protagonist; and he confesses to having approached his subject from a starting-point of reserve amounting to

mistrust if not hostility. But Shaw won him over — which is in itself a tribute to the enduring power of his work — and the result is a good book.

It is extensively documented and clearly evidences wide reading in the many fields to which Shaw leads the enquiring mind. This we would expect from Mr. Bentley. It is more than a trifle solemn, which we might also expect; there are times when one seems to over-hear an impish Shavian chuckle, in friendly comment on the extreme gravity of his champion. But there is, nevertheless, a certain sense of relief in reading a book about Shaw which does not relate a single "gossipy" anecdote nor quote a single post-card. (No doubt some statistician will one day calculate the hundreds of pounds of which Shaw has robbed the British Treasury by his persistent use of halfpenny stamps.) Finally, this study is informed with a feeling of humanity, of compassion and of warmth, which mark a major advance in Mr. Bentley's work.

The purpose of the book is clearly stated and adhered to; it "asks not what does Shaw think? but to what end does he think? what kind of a thinker is he? . . . what sort of artist? what kind of man? . . . what is the nature and upshot of his career?" The very considerable body of Shaw's non-dramatic work — his essays, prefaces, social and economic treatises, criticism and other fulminations — bulk larger in this book than do the plays themselves, which is a healthy thing since they are far less known to the general public and contain a great deal of rich and revealing material. Mr. Bentley has set himself the task of extracting from all of Shaw's apparent contradictions, tangential aphorisms, devil's advocacy and special pleadings, a coherent line of development and a dominant credo. This attempt to see Shaw "steadily and see him whole" results in the emergence of a figure of stature and nobility; one of the few modern writers to have maintained consistently an affirmative position in the face of a world filled with darkness and disillusion; one who believes man to have been born good as well as free; and one who has fought all his life for the evolution of God in man and through man. A critic of a new generation, a generation with new problems, changed issues and different pre-occupations, accords Shaw the honour of having lived up to his own most nobly stated credo:

This is the only true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one . . . the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. And also the only real tragedy in life is the being used by personally minded men for purposes which you recognize to be base. All the rest is at worst mere misfortune or mortality: this alone is misery, slavery, hell on earth.

In the course of this spiritual journey, Shaw has paid "an extraordinarily fruitful visit to many countries of the mind." Mr. Bentley discusses most of them in a sober attempt to discern the central purpose governing the excursions — the political and "vital" economics, the pronouncements of all kinds on a vast variety of subjects — many of them contradictory and almost all provocative. Sometimes he gets a little out of breath in the pursuit of Shaw's dancing and irrepressible attack on his themes; and in any study of Shaw that is not wholly condemnatory there almost has to be some kind of alter ego who may be held responsible for some of the wilder pranks. There is direct autobiographical evidence for the invention of "a privileged lunatic with the license of a jester"

whom Mr. Bentley calls G.B.S. It is this G.B.S. who adopted the tactics of inversion, the over-statements, the startling devices for making people first sit up and listen, then stand up and argue; whose instinct was "to attack every idea which had been full grown more than ten years," and who belabored his friends more often and more vigorously than his enemies, presumably because they offered more reasonable hopes of improvement.

This sugar-coating of jest which G.B.S. has wrapped around the plays of Shaw may be responsible for their enormous popularity, which seems to be almost unassailable in America at the present time. But it also accounts, or so Mr. Bentley thinks, for a "wide-spread prejudice against Shavian drama." Possibly he underrates the public a trifle — and, of course, he does not miss the opportunity to deal a few heavy blows at Broadway. He thinks, and rightly, that the Hell Scene from *Man and Superman* is one of Shaw's very greatest works; the audience poll recently held by Mr. Evans seems to prove that the public thinks so too, and let us hope that they will soon have the opportunity to see it. Nevertheless, it is true that in such a play as *Androcles and the Lion* the brilliance of Shaw's invention, his genius for farce-comedy, tends to smother the serious purpose of what he has to say, and that the heightened colour and speed of the theatre, for which he has such an irresistible flair, help to dim out the serious and religious ethic which lies behind the fable.

Mr. Bentley's analyses of the plays are subordinated to some degree to his central purpose. He inclines to classify and pigeonhole with almost too much rigor. This is a good book for a director of Shaw, a slightly dangerous one for an actor, whose function most certainly includes a clear grasp of the ideas he is expressing, but who is also charged with the duty of redressing the balance — sometimes unduly weighted by Mr. Shaw — in favour of human relations. Mr. Bentley is excellently perceptive of *Man and Superman*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Heartbreak House* and some of the lesser known plays such as *Getting Married* and *John Bull's Other Island*. *Pygmalion* proves itself as good material for a good critic as it is a cast-iron vehicle for even moderate actors. *St. Joan* is greater than Mr. Bentley; but then it is quite conceivably greater than Shaw himself.

Mr. Bentley bravely tackles the thorny question of Shaw's "characterization" of his dramatis personae — are they men or are they mouthpieces? He does not emerge quite scatheless from an attempt to combine the best of both classifications. In one paragraph he compares Shaw's powers in this respect with those of Dickens and Balzac, and in another assesses the minor characters as "pure victims of system," "machine-made minds." Perhaps the truth includes a little of both. If Lickcheese is something less than Dickensian, Doolittle is not quite a machine-made mind. But among many penetrating observations there are several which stick in the mind, as for instance the phrase "for Shaw ideas perform like characters," and "Shaw gave to comedy as personal a twist as Ibsen to tragedy." Nor does he omit a fine analysis of the amazing, athletic power of Shaw's prose, possibly the finest in English drama in its precision, cohesion and force. It is also — even more than Mr. Bentley knows — most astoundingly "speokable"; it is almost impossible for the actor with any sense of the English language to misplace or omit a single word of Shaw's dialogue, so unerringly are the words chosen and so exact and perfect are the rhythms of his phrases.

Perhaps there is no other writer whose prose is as superbly "right" when it is spoken as it is to the reader of the printed page.

Mr. Bentley's final conclusions are not altogether happy ones. He thinks that Shaw "is OBviously rather a sad old man"; that G.B.S. the jester has proved a Sorcerer's Apprentice to Shaw the philosopher and reformer; that despite a temporary success with the intelligentsia, when he stirred their minds and "excited their sense of moral issues," his propagandising has had no lasting effect. "We are still in the old ruts and things have gone from bad to worse." "When people paid attention to the ego of Shaw and not to the message of Shaw, when they paid attention to the small and not to the large things, this was the final catastrophe." It is undeniable that there is much truth in this, and that it is a sad truth. Yet perhaps the effect that Shaw had is more subtle and more permanent than may be superficially apparent. Though he may take issue with English society and government today as energetically as he ever did in the Nineties, many of his ideas have passed into its very structure and been absorbed by it. They are not so easily shrugged off. They have a way of cropping up; and the past tense, for Shaw, may not be altogether appropriate. This Mr. Bentley himself concedes, in according Shaw as an artist (an artist against his will and intention) and as a teacher the success he failed to achieve as a propagandist. In the extent to which he has obviously been moved by his subject, Mr. Bentley proves amply enough the vitality and endurance of Shaw as artist and teacher both. And even now . . . One is reminded of the concluding lines of the Trial Scene from *St. Joan* after her burning.

EXECUTIONER: You have heard the last of her, my Lord.

EARL OF WARWICK: The last of her? I wonder . . .

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN:

The Critic as Narcissus

MARK SCHORER: *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*. Holt.

HARVEY CURTIS WEBSTER: *On a Darkling Plain: The Art and Thought of Thomas Hardy*. University of Chicago Press.

ALBERT GUERARD, JR.: *Joseph Conrad*. Direction 1.

CHARLES OLSON: *Call Me Ishmael*. Reynal and Hitchcock.

Our text for today is Genesis 1:27: "So the Critic created the writer in his own image, in the image of the Critic created he him." It is amazing how much the subjects of these four books resemble their authors, or what one imagines their authors to be, or what their authors imagine themselves to be. Mr. Schorer's Blake appears to be a professor of English, like Mr. Schorer, who combines teaching with creative writing; a balanced liberal thinker concerned

with blending Einstein and Whitehead to avoid equally the extremes of positivism and mysticism, blending Marx and Freud to produce a radicalism tempered by psychological awareness, synthesizing "the contraries of a visionary temperament and a social intelligence," equating "his two fundamental impulses — the evangelical and the humanitarian." This up-to-date Blake, anxious to make the grade in *Partisan Review*, anticipates Coleridge on imagination, works out "the whole of Freud's teaching," "thrusts ahead into the realm of modern liberal theology," "expresses" William Morris's aesthetic socialism, precedes Hegel on his historical dialectic, enjoys "an intuition that anticipates Marx" about the economic basis of society, and invents "what in our time is known as the psychology of integration."

Mr. Webster's Hardy is, inevitably, a somewhat less remarkable figure. Like Blake, Mr. Schorer, and Mr. Webster, he is a professor of English, but unlike the first two, it is of an extremely academic sort, and he seems to have devoted himself chiefly to reading Darwinian literature for a doctoral dissertation, on the subject of The Suitability of Pessimism at the End of the Nineteenth Century. It is clear that he also reads PM, which is probably what enables him to "precapitulate — to a point — the history of most intelligent and sensitive men today." Mr. Guerard's Conrad, on the other hand, although he probably teaches at Harvard like his creator or will soon be tapped for it, is not academic at all: he is one of the younger experimental novelists, he gets his effects by combining techniques drawn from Joyce, Mann, Gide, Kafka, Faulkner, Warren, Greene, Hemingway, Wescott, Fitzgerald, and — inexplicably — Dr. Johnson and Irving Babbitt; and if he has any philosophy at all it is Existentialism. This paragon of new directions "almost seems to span" the "immeasurable distance between the poignant isolated figures of Melville's *Bartleby* and Kafka's *K*," and he becomes the historian of our age "by revealing the concealed sources of its moral unrest." Finally, Mr. Olson's Melville seems to have escaped the academy entirely, but he pays for it by wearing a plaid shirt and his hair tousled, much like Mr. Olson on the jacket of his book, and he is the biggest thing in Lawrence disciples since Edward Dahlberg.

Granted, this sort of low comedy is unfair to the books, all of which have something of value and several of which are quite impressive. Schorer's is a careful and scholarly intellectual biography, the fruit of years of study, that succeeds with patient documentation in rescuing Blake "from the dubious company of the mystics" and showing him as a passionate and complicated radical poet, without going to the other extreme with Bronowski and making him a simple revolutionary drum-beater. Webster's study, if it is no more than a Ph.D. thesis on the evolution of Hardy's philosophy, is at least a *good* Ph.D. thesis, with the novels read intelligently for their "thought" and a good deal of useful drudgery done, like counting the number of malign accidents in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (thirty-nine, he says). Guerard's brief treatment several times crosses over from monograph to genuine literary analysis, and in general his reading of the novels as "moral allegories" is both worth doing and done well. With the exception of several short articles by Morton Dauwen Zabel (acknowledged in Schorer's book, incidentally, for no reason I can even begin to imagine, as "Morton Downey Zabel"), particularly one Guerard does not mention, "Conrad: The Secret Sharer" in *The New Republic* for April 21, 1941, Guerard's book is probably the best thing we have on Conrad. Olson's book

includes, without even that much qualification, the best short piece on Melville with which I am familiar, the dramatic comparison of *Lear* and *Moby Dick* that appeared in an earlier version in the first issue of *Twice a Year* in 1938, and the rest of the book reflects research at least as elaborate as Schorer's, much less obtrusive, and somewhat more to the point.

Despite these various excellences, there is something clearly wrong with all four books, some definite flaw, that seems most obvious in their narcissism, although the narcissism is less apt to be a cause than a symptom. All four authors stand and stammer, at times, as though they sensed that there was something terribly important not yet said, and, unable to recall it, fill in with anything that comes to mind. Thus Schorer, although he recognizes that the Prophetic Books represent Blake's poetry "ultimately corrupted" by his anarchistic personality, and although he hovers on the verge of admitting that such a work as *The Four Zoas* is a dull and deadly muddle, isn't quite able to handle the books critically. What he does instead is synopsize them, occasionally getting passages (see page 321, among others) that read like nothing so much as Benchley's song synopses for Raquel Meller. When that palls, he quotes other writers at random, or refers to long strings of names. Here are two typical examples from adjacent pages:

. . . as for example Mrs. Langer, following Whitehead, has described it. Quoting Wittgenstein. . . .

. . . Blake must seem to have fallen into the dilemma of Tennyson as Carlyle described it — "carrying a bit of Chaos about him . . . which he is manufacturing into Cosmos." What Carlyle — or, perhaps, the scientist — was not in a position to know was that this had become the dilemma of *all* genuine poets, and was to remain their dilemma. With the possible exception of Thomas Hardy, nineteenth-century naturalism could not produce a single poet; it destroyed many.

Some modern poets have been able to give their credence to older systems of unification, as T. S. Eliot has; a few, like Rimbaud, Yeats, and Crane, have been able to create. . . .

and so on endlessly. Yeats in particular has his verse quoted at least a dozen times to explain something about Blake ("And yet, like Yeats, Blake might have said:") until the reader begins to wonder whether Professor Schorer hasn't gotten his notes into the wrong file.

In the same fashion, Webster goes to great lengths to disprove things nobody believes any longer, that Hardy was "one who is melancholy to the point of pessimism," or, even more naively, "It is a surprise to learn that he was not a victim of alcoholism and melancholia like James Thomson." He makes elaborate pointless conjectures about books that Hardy might have read and apparently didn't, with such gambits as "it would be a natural adjunct to his other studies," "perhaps he also became acquainted," "he may even have read," "conceivably, Hardy also read," "even if he was not familiar with," and (giving the show away) "if Hardy read any or all of these books (and there is no record of his reading any of them) there is no indication that they affected him in the least." These incantations then permit Webster to summarize the contents of the books in some detail. Guerard throws in names, names, names, as Schorer does, specializing in Sartre and Camus instead of Wittgenstein and Whitehead; summarizes the plots of Conrad's novels as Schorer synopsizes the Prophetic Books; and gives the same general sense of stalling for time until

he can think of what comes next. Olsen, although the first two-thirds of his book is bursting with new material he never gets a chance to discuss, including Melville documents here published for the first time and new historical and whaling material of enormous relevance, goes wild in the last third of the book, and goes chasing after Moses the Myth, Christ the Anti-Myth, the Pacific as HEART SEA, Ulysses as Atlantic Man, and page after page of similar half-coherent mumbo-jumbo. All four books reflect the same desperate casting about for material, and all of them, even the very brief Guerard and Olson studies, are far too long for what they actually get said, with the Webster and Schorer in particular endlessly padded and repetitive.

The thing lacking, of course, is critical method, adequate tools for actual literary analysis. It is the absence of the endless fertility of modern method to which we are accustomed that makes the books seem tongue-tied, and it is the absence of the objectivity of modern method that makes them all seem projections of their authors. In a sense, all four works are pre-Richards, fundamentally untouched by the critical revolution of the past quarter-century, although they wear all its good-conduct medals, and Schorer in particular quotes Richards endlessly. What the books have, essentially, is the sort of pastiche of modern criticism, the skimming of its surface bubbles, that Edmund Wilson has made peculiarly his own. (Guerard at least seems to recognize the relationship enough to model his restyling of Conrad on Wilson's similar attempt to give Dickens and Kipling the New Look.)

The best illustration of this flirtation with modern criticism is the use the authors make of Marx, Freud, and Frazer, who among them originate a good share of the new insights that have given modern criticism its character. Schorer quotes and refers to Marx and Engels, Freud and Jung, a good deal, but when he sees "the concept of adjustment in psychoanalysis, or that idyl of an ordered anarchy which is to follow upon 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' in Marxism" as "deficient of the tragic view of evil," he makes it clear that the Marxism he is talking about is Earl Browder's and the psychoanalysis Karen Horney's, and that he has either never read or never comprehended those fearful tragic dramas "Capital" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Webster quotes Marx and Granville Hicks, and mentions dialectical materialism, but they come to no more than the idea in the conclusion that Hardy might have looked into collective social action before giving up his individual radicalism, and of Freud, Webster is singularly innocent. Guerard poses triumphantly on the shore and dips one toe into the swirling black water: he scorns Gustav Morf's psychoanalytic study of Conrad (which I have never encountered, but which seems in his summary to be remarkably suggestive, and which Zabel takes rather more seriously); he notes an obvious psychological insight and remarks: "But at the brink of such dark speculations the present critic withdraws"; he passes off a sociological insight with the coy "a Marxist might see in that novel . . ." Olson, although much of his analysis is sociological, historical, and even economic, seems to have no use for Marx, and all he apparently wants of Freud, besides the melancholy euphemism of *Moses and Monotheism*, is the hardly-novel reading of Ahab's loss as a castration.

The greatest omission in the books, though, is neither Marx nor Freud, but the modern ritual understanding of folk material that stems from Sir J. G. Frazer, the sense, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, of "ritual drama as the hub."

Just as Blake failed to understand what myth was, and created tortured and baroque allegories in place of the clean and simple archetypal patterns of the myth, so Schorer, with considerably less excuse, misunderstands myth similarly, and in a chapter devoted to it, alternates between accepting Blake's Chinese-puzzle fantasies as myths, and adopting the rationalist view of myth as a damned lie, as in his reference to "the myth of man's native goodness." Similarly, Webster appears ignorant of the nature of tragedy, whether of the Greek drama or the Child ballads, and much of what he debates endlessly as Hardy's "pessimism" turns out to be not worth the trouble when recognized as *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*, the familiar recognition and change of fortune at the climax of all tragic poetry. (As far as I know, the identification of Hardy's "pessimistic" endings with the tragic conclusions of the folk ballad was first made by Donald Davidson in the Hardy number of *The Southern Review* in 1940). As Schorer is ignorant of myth and Webster of tragedy, Guerard similarly lacks any awareness of ritual. The concept of such ancient tribal rituals as initiation, fertility, the totemic feast, purification and expiation ceremonies, the killing of the god-king, etc., underlying Conrad's plots would have solved almost all of the obscurities of action and inexplicable motivation Guerard found in Conrad (any reader who cares to make the experiment can amuse himself by running through Guerard's plot summaries with primitive ritual in mind). Here again Olson comes through best, and even in the stew of eccentricities in the last part of his book, his use of the patterns of myth, tragedy, and ritual as clues to Melville stands out as extraordinarily fruitful.

An important part of modern criticism has centered around myth and ritual, whether in their ancient collective forms, as William Troy has used them in the study of fiction and Francis Fergusson of drama; in their modern individual substitutes, the private "symbolic action" in which Burke has specialized; or somewhere between, as in the fine recent studies by the English critic Walter Allen of novelists like Greene and Malraux. Other strands have drawn fruitfully on the insights of Marxist sociology, or Freudian psychoanalysis, or semantics and linguistics, or on fanatically close reading of the text, or on innumerable other methods and disciplines. Lacking all of these but their trappings and catch-words, we get the new academic criticism: intelligent, useful, often perceptive and sensitive, and generally pretty dull. Lacking a method, the critic turns out to have nothing but his own sensibility to apply, and applies it so successfully that he finds eventually he has drawn his subject looking enough like him to be his brother, and has kidnapped the man out of his own time and brought him home to live with the family. This is the characteristic vice and distortion of most of our critical studies, so that the four books under discussion are somewhat unfairly singled out, being hardly the worst, or even particularly bad, examples of the school (the worst in our time may very well be Vladimir Nabokov's émigré Czarist liberal and surrealist, Nikolai Gogol). The remedy lies either in a disciplined and objective method, using modern techniques to see the writer rigorously in his *own* context, or in some kind of symposium criticism that would balance its own excesses and emerge with something like a total, or at least a rounded, picture. Failing that, we can ask the authors of critical studies who are setting out to reduce writers to their own image at least to chose subjects who would not be too drastically diminished by such surgery.

Add The Files Of ACCENT To Your Library

1) ACCENT ANTHOLOGY — a 687-page selection from the first five years, 1940-1945, published by Harcourt, Brace, containing:

Narrative prose by 26 writers: Eudora Welty, James Hanley, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Jack Jones, Katherine Anne Porter, Paul Bartlett, Irwin Shaw, Kay Boyle, Richard Posner, J. F. Powers, Gilbert Neiman, Agnes Macdonald, Sidney Alexander, James T. Farrell, Jules Laforgue, Richard Wright, etc.

Poetry by 45 writers: A. M. Klein, Marguerite Young, E. E. Cummings, Rosalie Moore, Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, W. Y. Tindall, Horace Gregory, C. E. Aufderheide, Henry Treece, Robert Fitzgerald, Marius Bewley, Harry Brown, Jean Garrigue, Kenneth O. Hanson, George P. Elliott, John Berryman, etc.

Critical prose by 18 writers: R. P. Blackmur, Kenneth Burke, Marjorie Brace, Delmore Schwartz, F. O. Matthiessen, Paul Rosenfeld, Cleanth Brooks, Otis Ferguson, David Daiches, Harry Slochower, Wallace Fowle, Arthur Mizener, Eric Bentley, T. Weiss, Richard Eberhart, E. B. Burgum, Ruth Herschberger, Henry Miller

Published price . . . \$4.00

2) Single copies, 1946-1948:

WINTER 1946: *An Interpretation of Gide* by Wallace Fowle, *What Is Epic Theatre?* by Eric Bentley, stories by J. F. Powers and Victor H. Johnson, poems by Horace Gregory, C. C. Wallis, George Anthony, Barbara Howes, etc. . . . 30c

SPRING 1946: *Literature as an Institution* by Harry Levin, *A Psychoanalytical Essay on Yeats* by Morton I. Seiden, *Parker Tyler's Poetry* by William Carlos Williams, *Three Ballads* by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Ben Field and Peggy Bennett, poems by Howard Nutt, Josephine Miles, J. M. Brinnin, etc. . . . 30c

SUMMER 1946: *The Case of Vachel Lindsay* by Austin Warren, *Eliot's 'Death by Water'* by Grover Smith, *Naturalism in 1946* by C. C. Walcutt, stories by Katherine Anne Porter and Flannery O'Connor, poems by Mina Loy, Richard Wilbur, David C. DeJong, Ruth Lechlitrer, etc. . . . 30c

AUTUMN 1946: *The Death of Mayakowsky* by Boris Pasternak, *The Prolapsed World of Sartre* by W. M. Frohock, two plays by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Jack Jones and Reginald Moore, poems by Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, etc. . . . 30c

WINTER 1947: *Hopkins* by Henry Silverstein, *Tate's 'The Fathers'* by Arthur Mizener, *Hardy and Waugh* by Robert B. Heilman, stories by William Fifield and Edwin Moseley, poems by Rosalie Moore, Mina Loy, J. F. Nims, etc. . . . 30c

SPRING 1947: *Van Wyck Brooks and Biographical Criticism* by Stanley E. Hyman, *Symbol and Theme in 'Flowering Judas'* by Ray B. West, Jr., stories by J. F. Powers and Daniel Curley, poems by Boris Pasternak, Esther McCoy, etc. . . . 30c

SUMMER 1947: *Ideology and Myth* by Kenneth Burke, *An Analysis of 'All the King's Men'* by Norton Girault, *The Cancelling Out—A Note on Recent Poetry* by Joseph Warren Beach, stories by Ruth Domino and Morris Emmett, poems by Robert Horan, Edwin Honig, Alfred Young Fisher, Gene Baroff, etc. . . . 30c

AUTUMN 1947: *Keats and Crane* by Frajam Taylor, *The Two Natures in 'King Lear'* by Robert B. Heilman, *On the Portable D. H. Lawrence* by Vernon A. Young, *The Horatians and the Curatians*—a play by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Elizabeth Berridge and Howard Moss, poems by Wallace Stevens, Nelson Del Bittner, etc. . . . 30c

WINTER 1948: *The French Literary Mind* by Wallace Fowle, *Kafka's Cage* by R. W. Stallman, *Criticism for the Next Phase* by Kenneth Burke, *Big Medicine in 'Moby Dick'* by Reginald L. Cook, stories by R. V. Cassill and William Sansom, poems by F. Garcia Lorca, Jene Lyon, James Merrill, Arthur Gregor, etc. . . . 30c

3) A one-year subscription (starting Spring or Summer 1948) . . . \$1.00

Total value . . . \$7.70

Any of the above items may be ordered separately. Note however, that you may obtain all of them for only
\$6.00

Address ACCENT, 102 University Station, Urbana, Illinois